

Boston Early Music Festival

INTERNATIONAL BAROQUE OPERA • CELEBRATED CONCERTS • WORLD-FAMOUS EXHIBITION

Boston Early Music Festival
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 2, 2017

The GRAMMY-Winning Boston Early Music Festival presents concert performances of Handel's *Almira* on Thanksgiving weekend – November 25 & 26 in Boston

Cambridge, MA – BEMF's own GRAMMY Award-winning Musical Directors **Paul O'Dette** and **Stephen Stubbs** return on Thanksgiving weekend to lead an outstanding cast of 8 internationally renowned singers and the 28 all-star instrumentalists of our famed BEMF Orchestra in a grand concert performance of George Frideric Handel's first opera, *Almira*, on Saturday, November 25, 2017 at 8pm and Sunday, November 26, 2017 at 3pm at New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall in Boston. 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. This is truly an extraordinary event you simply won't want to miss!

"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."

The concert performance of *Almira* will be led by Musical Directors **Paul O'Dette** and **Stephen Stubbs** and Concertmaster **Robert Mealy**. The stellar cast features internationally recognized soprano **Sherezade Panthaki** in the title role. Making her BEMF debut in this production, Ms. Panthaki is known for her "breathtaking combination of expressive ardor, tonal clarity, technical mastery and dramatic vividness" (*The San Francisco Chronicle*). Returning cast members from the 2013 performances include brilliant soprano **Amanda Forsythe** ("the star of the show," —*The Wall Street Journal*) as the princess *Edilia*; tenor **Colin Balzer** ("ardent and effective," —*The New York Times*) as the mysterious orphan Fernando; baritone **Christian Immler** ("wonderful," —*The Wall Street Journal*) as *Almira's* guardian, *Consalvo*; and **Zachary Wilder** ("fearless comic aplomb," —*Hub Review*) as *Consalvo's* caddish son *Osman*. Completing the cast will be baritone **Jesse Blumberg** as *Raymondo*, soprano **Teresa Wakim** as *Bellante*, and tenor **Jan Kobow** as *Tabarco*.

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.

PROGRAM: **George Frideric Handel's *Almira***

ARTISTS: **Paul O'Dette & Stephen Stubbs, *Musical Directors***
Gilbert Blin, *Opera Director*
Robert Mealy, *Concertmaster*

Sherezade Panthaki, *Almira*
Amanda Forsythe, *Edilia*
Colin Balzer, *Fernando*
Christian Immler, *Consalvo*
Zachary Wilder, *Osman*
Jesse Blumberg, *Raymondo*
Teresa Wakim, *Bellante*
Jan Kobow, *Tabarco*

Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra

Robert Mealy, Cynthia Roberts, Beth Wenstrom, Jeffrey Girton, Sarah Darling, Jesse Irons, Julie Andrijeski, Johanna Novom, Karina Schmitz & Emily Dahl, *violin*; Laura Jeppesen, Daniel Elyar & David Douglass, *viola*; Phoebe Carrai, Beiliang Zhu, David Morris & Michael Unterman, *violoncello*; Douglas Balliett, *bass*; Gonzalo X. Ruiz & Kathryn Montoya, *oboe & recorder*; Dominic Teresi & Allen Hamrick, *bassoon*; Samuel Budish, *percussion*; Michael Sponseller, *harpsichord*; Paul O'Dette, *theorbo*; Stephen Stubbs, *Baroque guitar & theorbo*; Maxine Eilander, *Baroque harp*; Erin Headley, *viola da gamba*

WHEN: **Saturday, November 25, 2017 at 8pm**
Sunday, November 26, 2017 at 3pm

New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall, 30 Gainsborough Street, Boston, MA

TICKETS: Tickets are priced at **\$25, \$45, \$55, \$75, and \$125** each, and can be purchased at **[www.BEMF.org](http://www.bemf.org)** and **617-661-1812**, as well as through the Jordan Hall Box Office located at 30 Gainsborough Street in Boston, and by telephone at 617-585-1260; a \$5 discount for students, seniors, and groups is available by calling 617-661-1812. Subscription discounts are available with the purchase of three or more programs on the 2017-2018 Season.

ASSOCIATED EVENTS:

There will a Pre-Concert Talk with author and Handel scholar Ellen T. Harris one hour prior to each performance.

RESOURCES:

Download artist photos: <http://www.bemf.org/pages/press/images.htm>

BEMF's 2017–2018 Season Press Release: http://www.bemf.org/pages/press/082317_1718season.htm

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-winning and four GRAMMY-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 20th Boston Early Music Festival will take place from June 9-16, 2019, and will feature fully staged performances of Agostino Steffani's *Orlando* as the centerpiece opera. 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 2017–2018 Boston Early Music Festival Concert Series is presented with support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, National Endowment for the Arts, ConstellationCenter, WGBH Radio Boston, Harpsichord Clearing House, and The Gregory E. Bulger Foundation.

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

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