

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 6, 2011

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



THE BOSTON EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL RETURNS TO THE BERKSHIRES FOR TWO EXTRAORDINARY OPERA PRODUCTIONS AT THE MAHAIWE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER, JUNE 24-27, 2011

Cambridge, MA – June 6, 2011 – This June, the Boston Early Music Festival will make its highly anticipated return to the Berkshires with two opera productions at the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center. The four performances will include the fully-staged North American premiere production of **Steffani's *Niobe, Regina di Tebe*** on **Friday, June 24, 2011 at 7pm** and **Saturday, June 25, 2011 at 7pm** and an encore presentation the BEMF Chamber Opera Series production of the 1718 chamber version of **Handel's *Acis and Galatea*** on **Sunday, June 26, 2011 at 3:30pm** and **Monday, June 27, 2011 at 7pm** at the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center (14 Castle Street, Great Barrington, MA).

“For the first time ever, BEMF is thrilled to be bringing two opera productions to the Berkshires,” proclaims **BEMF Executive Director Kathleen Fay**. Local arts lovers and opera enthusiasts can enjoy the splendor and spectacle of our fully-staged Centerpiece Opera, Steffani's *Niobe, Regina di Tebe*, as well as a gorgeous and intimate production of one of Handel's most beloved operas. BEMF has been honored to present Baroque Operas at the wonderful Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center since 2003 and we hope to continue entertaining Berkshire audiences with these two exquisite productions.”

CENTERPIECE OPERA—Steffani's *Niobe, Regina di Tebe*

The operatic centerpiece of the 2011 Festival will be the North American premiere of *Niobe, Regina di Tebe* (Niobe, Queen of Thebes) by the Italian composer Agostino Steffani (1653–1728). *Niobe* will be led by three-time Grammy-nominated BEMF Artistic Co-Directors **Paul O'Dette** and **Stephen Stubbs**; along with Stage Director and Set Designer **Gilbert Blin**; Costume Designer **Anna Watkins**; Choreographers **Caroline Copeland** and **Carlos Fittante**; and Lighting Designer **Lenore Doxsee**. The internationally acclaimed cast will be led by soprano **Amanda Forsythe** in the title role of Niobe. She has performed in numerous BEMF opera productions and is a rising international star who has garnered critical acclaim for her “lovely range of vocal colors, gorgeous top notes and terrific agility” (*The Wall Street Journal*). In the role of Anfione, Niobe's husband, countertenor **Philippe Jaroussky** makes his North American stage debut. He has established himself as one of the world's greatest countertenors with a 2008 Echo Award for Best Singer and a profile in *The New York Times Magazine* among the growing number of accolades for his virtuosic coloratura and compelling dramatic interpretations. Joining them will be the internationally-acclaimed 34-piece **Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra**, the new **BEMF Baroque Dance Ensemble**, and members of the nationally-renowned **PALS Children's Chorus**. Flying effects will be provided by **ZFX, Inc.**

Composed in 1688 while Steffani was employed by Maximilian Emanuel, Elector of Bavaria in Munich, *Niobe, Regina di Tebe* is composed to a libretto by Luigi Orlandi, inspired by the mythological tale in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. One of the more tragic figures of Greek mythology, Niobe ruled the city of Thebes with her husband Anfione. Niobe considered herself the gods' equal, and in a moment of arrogance, mocked the god Leto for having a mere two children to her own brood of seven sons and

seven daughters. Leto avenged this act of hubris by slaying all fourteen of Niobe's children. Overwhelmed with grief, Anfione took his own life upon learning of the deaths. With her entire family gone, Niobe turned to stone, from which her tears now endlessly flow.

Visit http://www.bemf.org/pages/fest/niobe_video.htm for a behind-the-scenes video preview of Steffani's *Niobe, Regina di Tebe* featuring rehearsal footage and interviews with the Directorial Staff.

BEMF CHAMBER OPERA—Handel's *Acis and Galatea*

In addition to the fully staged centerpiece opera, the 2011 Festival will feature an encore production of the BEMF Chamber Opera Series' intimate staging of Handel's original 1718 chamber version of *Acis and Galatea*. When BEMF first presented this opera in 2009, *The Boston Globe* hailed the production as "Musically impeccable." Written as a courtly entertainment about the simplicity of rural life, *Acis and Galatea* depicts the love affair between the nymph Galatea (**Teresa Wakim**, soprano) and the shepherd Acis (**Aaron Sheehan**, tenor), who must endure a long separation. Their reunion is thwarted by the giant Polyphemus (**Douglas Williams**, baritone), who is himself in love with Galatea. Polyphemus kills Acis, and as Galatea laments the loss of her lover, she uses her divine powers to transform Acis into an everlasting fountain. This semi-staged production features gorgeous costumes, exquisite staging, and outstanding performances by the **BEMF Vocal and Chamber Ensembles** under the direction of Musical Directors **Paul O'Dette** and **Stephen Stubbs** and Stage Director **Gilbert Blin**.

Visit http://www.bemf.org/pages/fest/acis_video.htm for a video featuring scenes from the original BEMF production of Handel's *Acis and Galatea* from November, 2009.

ABOUT THE BOSTON EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL

Recognized as the preeminent early music presenting organization 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, the Boston Early Music Festival offers diverse programs and activities, including three 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 2011 Boston Early Music Festival is presented with support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, ConstellationCenter, WGBH Radio Boston, Harpsichord Clearing House, Zuckermann Harpsichords International, the National Endowment for the Arts, The Gregory E. Bulger Foundation, the U. S. Trust/Bank of America Private Wealth Management, the Dante Alighieri Society, the Viola da Gamba Society of America, and the American Recorder Society. 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.

RESOURCES:

2011 Festival Press Ticket Policy
<http://www.bemf.org/pages/press/presstix.htm>

Press Images:
<http://www.bemf.org/pages/press/images.htm>

BOSTON EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL IN THE BERKSHIRES CALENDAR

Steffani's *Niobe, Regina di Tebe* (Niobe, Queen of Thebes)

Fully staged operatic centerpiece of the Festival

Friday, June 24, 2011 at 7pm

Saturday, June 25, 2011 at 7pm

Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center (14 Castle Street, Great Barrington, MA)

Amanda Forsythe, *Niobe*

Philippe Jaroussky, *Anfione*

Yulia Van Doren, *Manto*

Charles Robert Stephens, *Tiresia*

Kevin D. Skelton, *Clearte*

Matthew White, *Creonte*

Jesse Blumberg, *Polifierno*

Colin Balzer, *Tiberino*

José Lemos, *Nerea*

Paul O'Dette and Stephen Stubbs, *Musical Directors*

Gilbert Blin, *Stage Director*

Caroline Copeland and Carlos Fittante, *Choreographers*

Anna Watkins, *Costume Designer*

Gilbert Blin, *Set Designer*

Lenore Doxsee, *Lighting Designer*

Flying effects provided by ZFX, Inc.

Tickets: \$30 - \$65 - \$95

Handel's *Acis and Galatea*

BEMF Chamber Opera Series

Sunday, June 26, 2011 at 3:30pm

Monday, June 27, 2011 at 7pm

Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center (14 Castle Street, Great Barrington, MA)

Teresa Wakim, *Galatea*

Aaron Sheehan, *Acis*

Jason McStoots, *Damon*

Michael Kelly, *Coridon*

Douglas Williams, *Polyphemus*

Paul O'Dette and Stephen Stubbs, *Musical Directors*

Gilbert Blin, *Stage Director*

Anna Watkins, *Costume Designer*

Tickets: \$25 - \$55 - \$80

Dates, times, venues, artists, and programs are subject to change.

###