'Psyche' to anchor BEMF's '07 program

By Richard Dyer, Globe Staff  |  December 23, 2005

The Boston Early Music Festival said this week that the centerpiece operatic production of the 2007 festival will be "Psyche" (pronounced "See-shay") by Jean-Baptiste Lully. This will be the first modern staging of the 17th-century work.

Boston Early Music Festival executive director Kathleen Fay said that there will be five performances plus an open dress rehearsal in the Cutler Majestic Theatre June 11-17, 2007. The prominent young British soprano Carolyn Sampson will take the title role, and BEMF diva Karina Gauvin will return in the role of Venus. The work will be performed in a new edition prepared for the festival by musicologist John Powell.

The stage director will be the acclaimed Benjamin Lazar, who is in his 20s; Lazar's staging of the Lully/Moliere work "Le bourgeois gentilhomme" with the early-music ensemble Le Poeme Harmonique was recently a huge hit in Paris. Choreographers Lucy Graham and Melinda Sullivan will be in charge of the important dance dimension of the piece. Festival co-artistic directors Paul O'Dette and Stephen Stubbs will supervise the musical performance.

"Psyche" exists in two principal versions, Fay said. "In 1671 it was performed as a 'tragedie ballet' built around a play by Moliere; we decided not to perform that [version with spoken text in French] for obvious reasons. In 1678 it was revised as a 'tragedie lyrique' without Moliere's prose text. The opera was immensely popular in the court of Louis XIV. The main reason it hasn't been revived in modern times, like some of Lully's other operas, is that it exists in so many versions in so many libraries. Creating a viable final edition is an early priority for us."

Fay recently returned from meetings in Europe to discuss touring the production to various venues there and making a recording at the end of 2007. She said she also hopes Tanglewood will present the production in the Berkshires.
Meanwhile, the most recent BEMF opera, Johann Mattheson's "Boris Goudenow," presented earlier this year, will have performances in Moscow's Novaya Opera House and at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg next September. "While we're at it, I'd like to remount it here in Boston over Thanksgiving weekend [next year] because some of the potential audience for our production wasn't in town during the regular festival period last June," Fay said.

Fay is savoring BEMF's recent Grammy nomination, its first, and the latest feather in the festival's cap: CPO's recording of the 2003 BEMF opera, Conradi's "Ariadne," was nominated in the best operatic recording category.

"We know that 'Ariadne' is competing in a strong field, but we have to go to the ceremonies," Fay said. "I called Karina [Gauvin], who sang the title role, and told her to go out and get a dress so she can meet me in Los Angeles on Feb. 8."

'Beggar's Opera' put off
Vox Consort has postponed its production of John Gay's "Beggar's Opera," which was scheduled to open March 25, until next October. In a statement, Vox Consort's executive director, Stephen Marc Beaudoin, said, "If [we are] going to fulfill our ambition of being a major player in Boston's classical music scene, then we must take a few months' reprieve to plan and reach out to our fans and friends in the area." Vox Consort's founding music director, Richard A. A. Larraga, resigned last May, and the group is currently searching for a successor while trying to stabilize its financial position.

The cast for "The Beggar's Opera" has accepted the postponement and agreed to return in October, and Michael Beattie remains on board as conductor of the production.

Orchestral residencies
Two Boston-area composers who teach at New England Conservatory have been appointed to the "Music Alive" orchestral residencies jointly administered by the organizations Meet the Composer and the American Symphony Orchestra League. Lee Hyla will work with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra for three years. Michael Gandolfi will have a three-week residency with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra next October and in May 2007.

In addition, New York composer Lisa Bielawa will have a three-year residency with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project. And composer David Ludwig, who teaches at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia and serves as a Gardner museum resident artist, will work with the Vermont Symphony Orchestra for three years.

Acclaim for baritone
Baritone Stephen Salters, who trained at Boston University and is a regular guest with local performing groups, recently sang a recital at the Kennedy Center in Washington and won a rave from critic Stephen Brookes in The Washington Post, who called Salters's recital "fearless and flawless."

"Not only does he sound like God on a good day," Brookes wrote, "but he's intensely imaginative and adventurous,
navigating repertoire that would make most singers creep into the wings and weep."