

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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EMV Presents Henry Purcell's Ode to Music's Patron Saint
– Hail Bright Cecilia –

***Celebratory Work Marks Conclusion of
 2019 Vancouver Bach Festival***

Vancouver, BC — **Early Music Vancouver (EMV)** is proud to present the culmination of the 2019 Vancouver Bach Festival with **Henry Purcell's *Hail Bright Cecilia***, on **August 9, 2019 at 7:30pm** at the **Chan Centre for the Performing Arts**. Esteemed conductor and organist **Alexander Weimann** leads this performance, featuring 20 instrumentalists of the **Pacific Baroque Orchestra**, and six internationally renowned vocal soloists. The richly textured 1692 ode to the patron saint of music represents a colourful exploration of the universal power of music to beguile, in a celebration fitting of EMV's 50th anniversary season.

"Everyone has a specific album or two that they played on endless repeat as teenagers. For me, it was Andrew Parrott's 1986 recording of Henry Purcell's *Hail Bright Cecilia*...as well as *Seven and the Ragged Tiger* by Duran Duran," laughs Matthew White, Executive and Artistic Director of EMV. "*Hail Bright Cecilia* is, simply put, one of the most charming pieces of music ever written to English text. From the seductive whisperings of the recorders, violins, and lutes, to the impressive strength of the trumpets, timpani, and organ, this work offers each instrument and voice type the opportunity to demonstrate its own unique power of persuasion. I can think of no better way to celebrate 50 years of EMV than with a tribute to heavenly harmony and the patron saint of music herself."

The first half of the concert features music by two important English composers who preceded Purcell and influenced him: Matthew Locke and John Blow. The programme begins with excerpts from Locke's "incidental music" written to complement Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Locke was a family friend of Purcell's and a leading composer for the London stage, who served King Charles as "Composer for the Violins" — a position that Purcell later filled. During the 1650s, the Commonwealth government forbade spoken theatre, though musical performances remained permissible. Shakespeare lovers added incidental instrumental and vocal music throughout his plays as a way of circumventing these restrictions. In this case, Locke provided instrumental music, including the *Curtain Tune*, which is a realistic depiction of the storm so central to *The Tempest's* plot, while Pelham Humfrey, Pietro Reggio, and John Banister all contributed the vocal music.

The first half also includes a song by Blow, who was Purcell's teacher and friend. The fact that Blow was the organist at Westminster Abbey both before and after Purcell's death is quite unusual, but his fame should more soundly rest on his abilities as a composer, and they are substantial. The song *Welcome, Every Guest* is taken from *Amphion Anglicus*, a large group of his songs set for one to four voices that deserves more attention.

In a time when arts and culture were viewed as evidence of a society's power and sophistication, annual celebratory commissions of Britain's best poets and composers in honour of Saint Cecilia were the norm at the English court. Purcell's *Hail Bright Cecilia* (1692) is a setting of a text by Nicholas Brady that is a reworking of John Dryden's famous poem *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day* (1687) that was set in 1691 by his teacher, Blow, as an *Ode for Saint Cecilia*.

Purcell's setting uses relatively large-scale orchestral forces (strings, oboes, bassoon, recorders, trumpets, and timpani), and combinations of vocal solos, duets, trios, and choruses to express the universal power and cosmic significance of music, and also to demonstrate the characteristics associated with different instruments and musical genres. It is the last and greatest of his four odes.

"Purcell is one of the greatest composers of the Baroque period and *Hail Bright Cecilia* is arguably one of his greatest works. He is unique among his contemporaries for his ability to blend the stylistic and technical conventions of his time, and to transcend them with what is an extremely bold and expressive personal style," explains PBO Music Director Alexander Weimann. "He unfailingly takes the listener on a musical journey, subverting expectations and inspiring a kaleidoscope of emotions from heart-breaking disappointment to sublime joy. In addition to being inspiring for the audience, this is a masterpiece that also appeals to musicians. It is extremely satisfying to both study and play, and we couldn't be more excited to perform it as the conclusion of the Bach Festival."

EMV's highly anticipated closing concert will feature six internationally renowned vocal soloists: **Suzie LeBlanc** (soprano), **Dorothee Miels** (soprano), **Alex Potter** (counter-tenor), **Samuel Boden** (tenor), **Sumner Thompson** (baritone), and **Matthew Brook** (bass-baritone). The all-star vocalists will be paired with Vancouver's own Juno-nominated Pacific Baroque Orchestra (PBO), led under the baton of acclaimed Music Director Alexander Weimann. Formed in 1990, the PBO is recognized as one of Canada's most exciting and innovative ensembles that brings the music of the past up to date by performing with cutting-edge style and enthusiasm. These combined forces at the Chan Centre will perform what promises to be a captivating conclusion to the 2019 Vancouver Bach Festival.

ABOUT EARLY MUSIC VANCOUVER (earlymusic.bc.ca)

For 50 years, Early Music Vancouver (EMV) has dedicated itself to fostering an understanding and appreciation of musical treasures from the Renaissance, Baroque, and Classical periods. Currently under the leadership of Matthew White — renowned countertenor and founding director of the Québec-based ensemble *Les Voix Baroques* — EMV continues to garner international acclaim as the largest presenter of early music in Canada, and as one of the most active and innovative organizations in its field in North America. EMV is proud of its educational outreach initiatives that include its popular, annual summer festival at UBC's School of Music; a new Baroque Mentorship Orchestra; community lectures; and instrument instruction and preservation.

LISTING INFORMATION

Early Music Vancouver presents *Purcell's Hail Bright Cecilia*

Date: Friday, August 9 at 7:30pm
(Pre-Concert Talk at 6:45pm with Alexander Weimann and Matthew White)

Address: Chan Shun Concert Hall
Chan Centre for the Performing Arts
6265 Crescent Rd., Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1

Ticket Prices: From \$18

Box Office: earlymusic.bc.ca or 604-822-2697

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