

FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE

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**CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS THE ACCLAIMED
VENICE BAROQUE ORCHESTRA
IN A CONCERT STAGING OF HANDEL'S RARELY-PERFORMED
OPERA *SIROE*
AT ZELLERBACH HALL FRIDAY & SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13 & 14**

**SIGHTLINES: Pre-concert talks with UC Berkeley musicologist
Kate van Orden at 7:00 p.m. Friday & Saturday, February 13 & 14**

BERKELEY, January 9, 2004 – The early music specialists of the **Venice Baroque Orchestra**, led by conductor, harpsichordist and music director **Andrea Marcon**, make their West Coast debut appearance with a concert staging of Handel's "forgotten" opera *Siroe* at Cal Performances **Friday & Saturday, February 13 & 14 at 8:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall. With Teatro La Fenice in Venice, the Venice Baroque Orchestra first staged four sold-out performances of *Siroe* in December 2000, and the February performances of *Siroe* in Berkeley mark the Orchestra's first American concert performances of the opera and the ensemble's first visit to the West Coast. Committed to the rediscovery of first-rate Baroque works, the Venice Baroque Orchestra has participated in the recovery of a number of operas by such composers as Handel, Cavalli, and Marcello, and is widely lauded for its recordings and concert appearances throughout North America, Europe, and Asia. "Andrea Marcon's Venice Baroque Orchestra, five years old, has swiftly become a top European period ensemble...Joy and a sense of discovery are everywhere," wrote *The London Times* in 2002. Free *Sightlines* pre-concert talks with UC Berkeley musicologist Kate van Orden will take place at 7:00 p.m. both Friday and Saturday, one hour prior to the performance.

SIROE

First performed in London in 1728, *Siroe* was composed by Handel in his prime, with libretto by Pietro Metastasio and Nicola Haym. The original cast included the legendary alto castrato Senesino in the title role, as well as two rival sopranos so noted for arguing that they were lampooned in John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. *Siroe's* plot involves a young princess—

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Emira (performed in Berkeley by soprano **Katerina Beranova**)—who disguises herself as a man, intent on avenging the death of her father at the hand of the Persian King Cosroe (performed by bass-baritone **Robert Koller**). Siroe, elder son of Cosroe—sung by mezzo-soprano **Liliana Rugiero**—loves Emira. Numerous complications ensue, including imprisonment for Siroe and the foiling of the plot against Cosroe. In the end, Siroe becomes King of Persia, all is forgiven, and Emira renounces her plans for revenge. Countertenor **Roberto Balconi** as Medarse and soprano **Simone Kermes** as Laodice complete the cast. Historically a rarely performed work, *Siroe*'s full staging in Venice 2000 received high praise from the European press: "Handel's sublime music was in large part responsible for the power of the performance...but this power was sustained with intensity and extraordinary skill by the entire cast and conductor Andrea Marcon" (*La Repubblica*). And the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* observed that "those happy souls who had the chance to be present at this exquisite event could feel how important Handel must have been as an entertainer in the 18th century."

VENICE BAROQUE ORCHESTRA

Founded in 1997, the 19-member **Venice Baroque Orchestra** (VBO) is recognized as one of Europe's premier ensembles devoted to period instrument performance. The group has enjoyed considerable acclaim in major venues throughout the world, including Vienna, Paris, London, Brussels, Lisbon, Barcelona, Zurich, Geneva, Tokyo, Venice, Florence, Milan, Lyons, Berlin, Dusseldorf, Munich, Cologne, Frankfurt, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and Copenhagen, and made its United States debut in New York City in 2001. A 20-concert tour of the United States followed in 2002/03. In November 2003 Sony Classical released VBO's debut recording, featuring three previously unrecorded Vivaldi concerti, as well as a new interpretation of *The Four Seasons*. *Gramophone* magazine named the CD an "Editor's Choice" selection, praising the Orchestra's "great sound...full and forward and with every instrumental strand given its proper due. A superb new version of Vivaldi's perennial favorite and three works new to disc in stylish performances." Other recordings include the Locatelli violin concertos, and a collection of Bach arias featuring mezzo-soprano Angelika Kirchschrager. For its recording efforts, VBO has been honored with the Diaspason D'Or and Echo Awards. The ensemble recently signed a multi-album, exclusive contract with the Deutsche Grammophon label.

ANDREA MARCON

Internationally recognized for his activities as a conductor and early music scholar and for his prize-winning keyboard performances, **Andrea Marcon** was born in Treviso, Italy and began his career as harpsichordist and organist for that city's early music ensemble, Sonatori de la Gioiosa Marca. He went on to become professor of harpsichord, organ, and interpretation at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis and to serve as visiting professor at the Sweelinck Conservatorium in Amsterdam. He has taught at many other conservatories throughout Europe and has judged a number of international organ competitions. Since founding VBO, Marcon has led that ensemble on tour throughout the world, while continuing to focus on the rediscovery of Baroque masterpieces and on recording projects. This season he conducts the VBO throughout Germany, at festivals in Lucerne, Ambronay, Passau, and Eisenach, and at concerts in Zurich, Geneva, Lyon, Basel, and throughout the United States.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for the **Venice Baroque Orchestra** performing Handel's *Siroe* on **Friday & Saturday, February 13 & 14 at 8:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall are priced at **\$36.00, \$48.00 and \$56.00**. Tickets are available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu; and at the door. Half-price tickets are available for purchase by UC Berkeley students. UC faculty and staff, senior citizens and other students receive a \$2 discount, and UC Alumni Association members receive a \$3 discount (Special Events excluded).

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San Francisco Chronicle, *San Francisco* magazine, and KDFC Classical 102.1 FM are media sponsors of Cal Performances' 2003/04 performing arts season.

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Cal Performances' presentation of the Venice Baroque Orchestra is supported by the Instituto Italiano di Cultura, San Francisco.

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CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Friday & Saturday, February 13 & 14 at 7:00 p.m.
SIGHTLINES

Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley Campus
Bancroft Way at Telegraph, Berkeley

Pre-concert talks by UC Berkeley musicologist **Kate van Orden**. *Sightlines* is a continuing program of pre- and post-performance discussions with Cal Performances' guest artists and scholars, designed to enrich the audience's experience. These events are free to ticketholders.

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Friday & Saturday, February 13 & 14 at 8:00 p.m.

Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley Campus
Bancroft Way at Telegraph, Berkeley

Opera

Venice Baroque Orchestra
Andrea Marcon, conductor

Program:

Led by Baroque scholar and award-winning harpsichordist Andrea Marcon, the Venice Baroque Orchestra presents two semi-staged performances of Handel's rarely performed 1728 opera *Siroe*.

Tickets: \$36.00, \$48.00 and \$56.00, available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu; and at the door.

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