

**American conductor Kazem Abdullah signs five-year contract
As Generalmusikdirektor of one of Germany's oldest orchestras**

Culturally rich Aachen post includes both orchestral and operatic performances

Wednesday, January 25, 2012 – American conductor **Kazem Abdullah** officially became the **30th Generalmusikdirektor** of the city of **Aachen**, home to one of Germany's oldest orchestras, today. A press conference was held to formally introduce him to the public at the **Rathaus Aachen (Aachen's City Hall)** by **Mayor Marcel Phillippe** and **Aachen Theater Intendant Michael Schmitz-Aufferbeck**. Mr. Abdullah was unanimously elected to the post in November 2011 by the orchestra's Search Committee, having been selected as one of seven candidates invited to audition from a pool of 100. The press conference followed a private meeting in which Maestro Abdullah signed a five-year contract with the orchestra. **As the musical head of both Aachen's orchestral and operatic season, Abdullah will lead a concert series of eight major orchestral programs and six to seven operas, as well as special concerts and events.** During his current visit to Aachen, Maestro Abdullah will finalize the 2012-2013 season repertoire (to be announced at a later date).

Intendant Schmitz-Aufferbeck congratulated Mr. Abdullah, stating, "I am very pleased that next season Kazem Abdullah will become the new Generalmusikdirektor of the city of Aachen, and on this occasion I offer him my most heartfelt congratulations. From his previous work in Aachen, we know just how Abdullah's spark has vaulted over the orchestra and audience. I have only very rarely seen standing ovations here for a guest conductor. Abdullah thrills people. We have found a totally major talent."

Of his new post, which he will assume on August 1, 2012, Mr. Abdullah said, "I am honored to be elected Generalmusikdirektor of Aachen and humbled to think of those who have held this post before me. I am especially excited to build on the legacy of my predecessor, Marcus Bosch, and to continue making excellent music with an orchestra of such exceptional quality. In recent years, as its national and international reputations have grown, Aachen has developed a distinctive voice, well suited to a remarkably wide repertoire. This musical diversity is matched by the city itself, a combination of astonishing history and refreshing innovation. Its citizens, people of discriminating tastes but also down-to-earth hospitality, have cultivated a musical treasure, and I am so very happy to count myself among them."

In becoming General Music Director of Aachen, Mr. Abdullah inherits an orchestra steeped not only in cultural tradition (Aachen was the capital of western Europe in the 9th Century) but also musical firsts: it presented the Paris premiere of Weber's *Der Freischütz (The Marksman)*, and in 1825, then music director Ferdinand Ries conducted the Aachen premiere of the Beethoven's 9th symphony, the first performance of the work outside of Vienna. Among the renowned music directors who preceded Maestro Abdullah at Aachen are Herbert von Karajan and Wolfgang Sawallisch.

A vibrant, versatile and compelling presence on the podium, the 32-year old conductor has experience in both the orchestral and operatic arenas, which will serve him well in his new position. Kazem Abdullah's orchestral credits include the Berliner Kammerphilharmonie, Philharmonisches Orchester der Stadt Nürnberg, Staatskapelle Weimar, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Orquesta Filarmónica de la Ciudad de México, Oregon Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the National Arts Center Orchestra of Ottawa, and the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra, where he

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substituted on very short notice to conduct performances of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* in collaboration with the Mark Morris Dance Group. Mr. Abdullah served as Assistant Conductor at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, a three-year post to which he was appointed by Music Director James Levine. In addition to Levine, while at the Met he worked with conductors such as Louis Langree, Kirill Petrenko, Lorin Maazel, and Fabio Luisi. A recipient of a 2010 Solti Foundation U.S Grant, Mr. Abdullah graduated from the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, where he trained as a clarinetist. He then studied at The Peabody Institute of the John Hopkins University before joining The New World Symphony as a clarinetist under Michael Tilson Thomas for two seasons, after which he continued his musical studies at the University of Southern California. His conducting teachers include Jorma Panula, Gustav Meier, Stefan Asbury, Bernard Haitink, and James Levine.

In a review of his October 2011 guest engagement with the Aachen Symphony Orchestra, the local newspaper *Aachener-Nachrichten/Aachener Zeitung* praised Maestro Abdullah's musical depth and command, "...standing ovations and spontaneous applause from the orchestra speak for themselves... [In the] sold-out second symphony concert by Abdullah with an overall successful interpretation of the *Symphony in D Minor* by Cesar Franck... Abdullah unfolds a most colorful and luminous orchestral sound with fascinating shades and spreads a wide dynamic range from real, viable pianissimos to rich, voluminous fortissimos. Abdullah cultivates both the overall sound as well as many solos into a sound of exquisite beauty."

Mark Stryker of the Detroit Free Press commented on the appointment, writing on *artsjournal.com*, "Abdullah is the real deal. He was in Detroit earlier this month to conduct *The Marriage of Figaro* for Michigan Opera Theatre and it was impressive, especially for one so young — musically stylish, frisky but warm and lyrical and the ensembles were alluring and well-balanced." (November 2011)

Aachen is Maestro Abdullah's first European post. One of the most historically rich cities of western Germany, the City of Aachen was a spa destination dating back to the Roman times and a favorite respite of Charlemagne. It is still often called Aix-la-Chapelle by French and English speakers, a reminder that that the city's Cathedral, the Palatine Chapel once part of Charlemagne's palace, was the greatest monument of the Carolingian Renaissance and is today a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Located near the borders of Belgium and The Netherlands, today the city remains a destination for tourists and history lovers, as well as musicians and music fans. Its tradition of musical excellence includes a premiere orchestra and opera, both of which have been led by conductors such as Fritz Busch, Herbert von Karajan and Wolfgang Sawallisch.

Mr. Abdullah is represented in Europe by Till Janczukowicz of Vermont Classics and in North America by Tim Fox of Columbia Artist Management, Inc. Additional information on Kazem Abdullah can be found at:

www.kazemabdullah.com

www.theateraachen.de

www.cami.com

www.vermont-classics.com

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