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CARMEN OPENS BOSTON LYRIC OPERA'S 40TH SEASON, BLAZING A FIERY TRAIL OF RAW EMOTION IN CALIXTO BIEITO'S GROUNDBREAKING PRODUCTION

*Opera's famous femme fatale wreaks havoc in this east coast debut
of Boston Lyric Opera's co-production with San Francisco Opera.*

BOSTON – August 16, 2016 – Boston Lyric Opera (BLO) opens its 40th season with Calixto Bieito's bold staging of Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, the largest production the company has mounted in its four decades. Set in the arid earthiness of post-Franco Spanish North Africa, *Carmen* is a powerful account of a defiantly free-spirited woman and her obsessive lover. With the familiar story and iconic score that opera buffs and casual opera-goers alike know and love, BLO's *Carmen* opens September 23 for four performances through October 2. The run marks the company's debut at the Boston Opera House where *Carmen* will be the first professional opera produced at the venerable theater since 1991.

Bieito, the controversial Catalan opera and theater director, makes his U.S. opera debut in BLO's co-production with San Francisco Opera. Often called "the Quentin Tarantino of opera" for his no-holds-barred, raw re-imaginings of the classics, Bieito has been alternately hailed and reviled around the globe. One thing his productions have never been called is boring.

Bieito's *Carmen* premiered in 1999, and has been mounted around the world ever since. The action is set in the 1970s, in the blue-collar, autonomous seaside Spanish city of Ceuta on the north coast of Morocco. Of the work, Bieito has said, "This opera, from my point of view, deals with limits, the emotional and physical boundaries between people, and about freedom, love, violence, sorrow, desperation, solitude. Carmen is a young woman in the context of a difficult life where she has had to survive. She is intuitive, earthy, passionate, melancholy, sensitive — a young person who desires to drink up life — who is living in a dangerous and violent society. My *Carmen* is not picturesque, nor folkloric, nor a collection of engravings of a stereotypical old Spain. It is a *Carmen* that walks across the border." Following this American debut run, which played this spring in San Francisco, Bieito will direct a new production of Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* in the Metropolitan Opera's 2017-18 season.

The evocative production's design elements include Mercedes Benz W123 model cars, procured from throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, and other raw elements that suggest a gritty urban environment. The sedans were ubiquitous in Ceuta and surrounding areas, where they

are used as “Grand Taxis,” a popular form of transportation in the region. In keeping with Bieito’s aesthetic, the production includes graphic violence, brief nudity, and suggestive behavior. Parental discretion is advised.

Recently acclaimed for her leading role in BLO’s *Don Giovanni*, mezzo-soprano **Jennifer Johnson Cano** stars as the fiery, seductive gypsy who destroys the naïve, lovesick soldier Don José. José is played by tenor **Roger Honeywell**, who will debut at Covent Garden next season in their production of *The Exterminating Angel*. Returning after his extraordinary performances in the title role in BLO’s *Rigoletto*, baritone **Michael Mayes** will sing the role of the dashing bullfighter Escamillo. BLO’s Jane & Steven Akin Emerging Artist, soprano **Chelsea Basler** sings the role of Micaëla. [Additional casting information is below.]

David Angus leads the largest company ever assembled for a BLO production with the recognized Boston Lyric Opera Orchestra and a chorus of 84 singers, including members of Voices Boston. Revival Director for this production is Bieito’s frequent collaborator **Joan Anton Rechi**. The BLO / SFO co-production, based on Bieito’s 1999 original, was built by the San Francisco Opera production department, reuniting the original creative team of set designer **Alfons Flores** and costume designer **Mercè Paloma**. Boston’s production features lighting by award-winning theater, opera and dance designer **Robert Wierzel**, and wig and makeup design by Boston-based **Jason Allen**.

BLO’s Stanford Calderwood General & Artistic Director **Esther Nelson** says, “Opening the 40th Season with *Carmen* underscores another exciting turning point for BLO. Versions of this opera have been staged at significant moments in our history, most notably in 2000 when a free outdoor production, *Carmen on the Common*, surpassed attendance expectations with many thousands of operagoers, and launched BLO to greater city-wide awareness for a broader audience. We are eager for Boston audiences to see this provocative new production that underscores our commitment to exciting artists working within the iconic operatic canon but rethinking the traditional works for contemporary audiences.”

THE CAST

Jennifer Johnson Cano – Critically acclaimed mezzo-soprano Jennifer Johnson Cano, known for her profound musicianship, is a 2012 Richard Tucker Career Grant recipient and 2014 George London Winner. She won the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 2008, and made her Met debut in 2009-10. As first-prize winner of the 2009 Young Concert Artist International Auditions, she has debuted with pianist Christopher Cano at Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall and the Kennedy Center. Ms. Cano has performed at The Met as Mercédès, Emilia, Hansel, Nicklausse, Wellgunde and Waltraute, as well as Meg Page in *Falstaff* and Bersi in *Andrea Chenier*. She has appeared as Donna Elvira with Boston Lyric Opera and Arizona Opera, Dido with Saratoga Opera and in *Orfeo* with Des Moines Opera. Ms. Cano has continuing relationships with the Cleveland Orchestra, New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics, and has performed with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Kansas City Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony and Minnesota Orchestra. She gives her European debut with the LSO in London and Paris in December.

Roger Honeywell – Canadian Tenor Roger Honeywell returns to Boston Lyric Opera as Don José in *Carmen*. He appeared as Count Danilo in BLO's *The Merry Widow* after performing it at Michigan Opera Theatre in the 2014/15 Season. Mr. Honeywell performed with the Théâtre du Châtelet as Torasso in Sondheim's *Passion* and in the world premiere of Jennifer Higdon's *Cold Mountain* in the role of Veasey with the Santa Fe Opera. He also returned to Calgary as Nikolaus Sprink for the Canadian premiere of Kevin Puts' *Silent Night* and Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus* with Vancouver Opera. This past July, he appeared as Archbishop Roche in the world premiere of John Estacio's *Ours* with Opera on the Avalon in Newfoundland, Canada. Next season, Mr. Honeywell joins Covent Garden for their production of *The Exterminating Angel*.

Michael Mayes – Baritone Michael Mayes is known for his consummate portrayals of iconic characters in the operatic repertoire. Michael has performed with opera companies across the United States and made his BLO debut in the 2013/14 season production of *Rigoletto* in the title role. In the 2016/17 season and beyond, Mr. Mayes will make his debut with Washington National Opera in his celebrated role of Joseph De Rocher in *Dead Man Walking*, and will also take the role to Pensacola Opera, sing the roles of Older Thompson in *Glory Denied* with Nashville Opera, Doug in *Everest* with Dallas Opera, and make his debut the Teatro Real in Madrid.

Chelsea Basler – Boston resident and BLO Jane & Steven Akin Emerging Artist alumna Chelsea Basler plays Micaëla. An award-winning soprano, Chelsea has appeared several times with BLO as Valencienne in *The Merry Widow*, Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, Flora in *La Traviata* and Isolt in *The Love Potion*. She was a BLO Emerging Artist in the 2013/14 Season when she appeared as Papagena in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and sang the roles of Margret in *Lizzie Borden* (at BLO and Tanglewood) and Countess Ceprano in *Rigoletto*. She recently sang the title role in Pasadena Opera's production of *Susannah*, and shared the stage with Roger Honeywell as Sara in Santa Fe Opera's *Cold Mountain*. This past summer, she made her Opera Saratoga debut as Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*.

THE CREATIVE TEAM

Calixto Bieito (Production) – Making a Boston Lyric Opera debut as part of a bi-coastal American operatic debut that began with this production of *Carmen* last spring in San Francisco, Calixto Bieito created the original version of this production in 1999 at El Festival de Peralada in Catalonia and in 2000 at Opera Zuid in the Netherlands. He began his directing career at Teatro Romea in Barcelona, which he led between 1999 and 2011. Significant productions include *Così Fan Tutte* at the Welsh National Opera and *Un Ballo in Maschera* at Barcelona's Gran Teatre Liceu in 2000; *Don Giovanni* in Hanover in 2002, co-produced with English National Opera and Gran Teatre Liceu; followed by a scandalous production of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* at Berlin's Komische Oper in 2004, establishing his fame as one of Europe's foremost — and controversial — opera directors. His successful 2015 ENO production of *La Forza del Destino* will appear at the Metropolitan Opera in 2017 and then in Toronto in 2020. Among his current and upcoming projects are Reimann's *Lear at the Paris Opéra*, *La Juive* at the Staatsoper Munich, *Otello* at Hamburg's Staatsoper, and *Tosca* at the Norwegian National Opera in Oslo. From 2013 to 2015 he was an artist-in-residence at the Theater Basel.

David Angus (Conductor) – David Angus’ career has taken him from his home near London to orchestras and opera companies all over the world. Appointed as BLO’s music director in 2010, he now conducts the majority of the Company’s operas each season. He also regularly conducts the London Philharmonic Orchestra the honorary conductor of the Symphony Orchestra of Flanders, Wexcord Festival Opera and was previously the music director of Glimmerglass Opera, in addition to regularly working with some of the most celebrated musical organizations around the globe.

Joan Anton Rechi (Revival Director) – Joan Anton Rechi is making his Boston Lyric Opera debut with *Carmen*. He acted in theaters and on television before starting to work as a production assistant for directors, including Calixto Bieito, Robert Carsen, and Willy Decker. He began his own work as a director in 2003 with a theatrical adaptation of Offenbach’s *Orphée aux Enfers* at Barcelona’s Romea Theater. Recent engagements include a new production of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* in Darmstadt, Germany and the premiere of *Salome* in Bogotá, Colombia. Upcoming engagements include Monteverdi’s *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* in Peralada, Spain; Verdi’s *Il Trovatore* at Barcelona’s Grand Teatre del Liceu; and Strauss’ *Die Schweigsame Frau* in Aachen, Germany.

PERFORMANCE AND TICKET INFORMATION

Boston Lyric Opera’s production of *Carmen* runs September 23 – October 2, 2016 at the Boston Opera House 539 Washington St., Boston, with evening performances at 7:00, 7:30 p.m. and Sunday matinees at 3:00 p.m.

Tickets are \$25-\$175 and are available online at blo.org, by phone at 617.542.6772, and in-person at the Boston Lyric Opera administrative offices, located at the Road Scholar Building, 11 Avenue de Lafayette, Fourth Floor, Boston, MA. The Box Office is open Monday through Friday, 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. Group and student tickets are available through BLO Audience Services at 617.542.6772 or boxoffice@blo.org.

Pre-Performances talks are given one hour before each performance and are free to all ticket holders.

Season subscriptions are available through blo.org/tickets, or by contacting BLO Audience Services at 617.542.6772 or boxoffice@blo.org.

RELATED PROGRAMS and ACTIVITIES

Several fun and educational programs related to this production of *Carmen* are planned around the city. For more information visit blo.org.

Tuesday, August 23 • 6pm

Opera Divas: The Ladies of *Carmen*

Boston Public Library Central Branch, Rabb Hall

Free and open to the public

Defiant, daring, sensual, and unforgettable: strong female characters dominate the iconic opera *Carmen*, from the Micaëla, to the gypsies Mercédès and Frasquita, to the fiery Carmen herself. Join BLO as we kick off “40 Days of Opera” for our 40th Anniversary Season with an evening of passionate women. Experience contrasts in music and emotion as each expresses love, jealousy, spite, and joy through the rich melodies of Bizet’s masterpiece, and explore the real-life divas who took on and defined these extraordinary roles across the ages.

Friday, August 26 • 12:30 pm

BLO Concert in the Courtyard at BPL

Boston Public Library Central Branch, Courtyard

Free and open to the public

BLO joins the Boston Public Library Central Branch’s popular “Concerts in the Courtyard” summer series with a program titled “An Afternoon in Seville,” featuring some of opera’s beloved works set there – including selections from Bizet’s *Carmen*, opening BLO’s 40th Anniversary Season on September 23.

Saturday, September 10

Signature Series: Somerville Theater Film Screening

Details to Come

Monday, September 19 • 7-8:30PM

A Taste of Carmen: Spanish Wines, Tapas, and Opera

Boston Center for Adult Education (BCAE), 122 Arlington Street, Boston

Tickets: \$39; online at: <http://bit.ly/ATasteofCarmen>

Boston Lyric Opera visits the BCAE for a lively tastings tour through *CARMEN* – the tale of opera’s ultimate femme fatale and the upcoming BLO production. Pairing exotic flavors of Spain with the seductive music of a defiant gypsy girl and her lover, a selection of wine tastings and tapas will accompany curated recorded highlights of some of opera’s greatest artists. Adam Centamore, BCAE’s wine and cheese guru, curates a delicious tour of Spain alongside Boston Lyric Opera’s musical insights, creating a total sensory experience. **Attendees receive a discount on single ticket prices for BLO’s Carmen.** Performances at the Boston Opera House are September 23 – October 2, 2016. Details and a discount code will be shared with event purchasers.

Friday, September 23 • 40th Anniversary Opera Gala – Cocktails 5:30 PM; Carmen Opening Performance 7:00 PM; Gala Dinner 10:00 PM

\$750; available at blo.org or by phone at 617.542.4912 x229

Join BLO supporters for a full night of passion, with cocktails in the glorious lobbies of the Boston Opera House, seats for Opening Night of *Carmen*, and a gala dinner at the nearby Ritz-Carlton, Boston. Tickets are \$750 including the full night of activities. Dress is “Creative Black Tie.”

Friday, September 30 • 4:00-4:30 PM and 5:00-5:30 PM

Boston Opera House Public Backstage Tours

Free and open to the public – reservations required

Explore the Boston Opera House and the backstage workings of BLO's new production of Bizet's *Carmen*. See sets and costumes, admire the lavish Opera House from the perspective of the performers, and learn about its history. Spaces are limited. Presented as part of ArtWeek Boston.

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ABOUT BOSTON LYRIC OPERA

BLO is New England's leading fully-professional opera company, reaching close to 30,000 people of all ages annually. Now in its 40th season, BLO celebrates the art of the voice through its mission of building curiosity, enthusiasm and support for opera by creating musically and theatrically compelling productions, events, and educational resources for the Boston community and beyond. Since its founding in 1976, the company has staged world premieres, U.S. premieres, co-productions and co-commissions of note with organizations such as The Royal Opera, Covent Garden and Scottish Opera, and continues to be a destination for some of the leading artists, conductors, directors and designers from around the world.

MEDIA NOTE: Photos of featured performers and interviews about *Carmen* are available. For more information contact John Michael Kennedy, Goodman Media/Boston for BLO, at jmkennedy@goodmanmedia.com or 781-874-1803 (Boston); or Chesley Saatkamp or Melissa Goldberg, Goodman Media for BLO at BLO@goodmanmedia.com, or 212-576-2700 (New York direct).