



BOSTON LYRIC OPERA'S 2018/2019 SEASON: **STORIES OF DISSENTERS AND REBELS**

The Handmaid's Tale: Director Anne Bogart helms Poul Ruders and Paul Bentley's newly revised edition of Margaret Atwood's vital story.

The Rape of Lucretia: A new production brings timely resonance to Benjamin Britten's masterwork.

Schoenberg in Hollywood: Tod Machover and Simon Robson's Premiere plumbs a composer's conflicts.

The Barber of Seville: Season opens with a new production of the classic, directed by Rosetta Cucchi.

BOSTON – March 8, 2018 – Boston Lyric Opera's (BLO) 2018-2019 Season presents four operas, including a world premiere, that tell stories of rebels fighting oppression, societal rules and the effects of traumatic events. Operas about strong women, inspired by stories of women, and led by women directors, figure prominently in the season.

An adaptation of writer **Margaret Atwood's** resurgent novel *The Handmaid's Tale* gets a new production in May 2019 directed by **Anne Bogart**, with new orchestrations commissioned by BLO. In October 2018 director **Rosetta Cucchi**, a deft interpreter of opera classics including BLO's *The Marriage of Figaro* and *La Bohème*, helms the season-opening comedy *The Barber of Seville*, in which a cloistered woman shuns the patriarchal dowry system to pursue true love. A March 2019 production of Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, with a director to be announced, highlights the modern resonance in this ancient story of violation.

BLO's New Works commissioning program yields the season's fourth production, the previously announced World Premiere of **Tod Machover's** and **Simon Robson's** *Schoenberg in Hollywood* this November. The opera is inspired by the 20th Century composer's struggle to assimilate after fleeing Nazi Europe and maintain his artistic integrity amidst the lure of celebrity.

BLO continues its producing journey through traditional theaters and unconventional spaces in Boston next season. Fall offerings will be produced at Emerson College's Cutler Majestic Theater (*Barber*) and the Paramount Center (*Schoenberg*). Spring 2019 productions take place at Artists for Humanity's newly expanded EpiCenter facility in Fort Point (*Lucretia*) and a yet-to-be-named location, now in final negotiation, at a well-known regional institution (*Handmaid's Tale*).

"This coming season for Boston Lyric Opera is up-to-the-minute and propelled by the excitement that comes from finding new ways to tell stories and finding new inspirations in familiar stories," says Esther Nelson. "I love how the contemporary works next spring show a breadth of what our art form comprises – from Tod Machover's intimate, minimalist, electronic score to the grand modern sound of the orchestra in *Handmaid's Tale*. They complement and contrast the comic bel canto of *The Barber of Seville* which, under Rosetta Cucchi's sharp direction, becomes a way to explore class and gender, and Benjamin Britten's *Lucretia*, which convincingly tells a difficult ancient story with a modern resonance," Nelson says.

Nelson says some of the challenging and disturbing subject matter in its spring 2019 operas prompted BLO to work closely with community partners in Boston next season, to shape educational, informative, and supportive programs for the public and for production teams. [See “Offstage Support” below.]

THE BARBER OF SEVILLE, October 12-21, 2018

Gioacchino Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville* is one of the most popular operas in the classical canon and among the greatest examples of *opera buffa* (comic opera). A prequel to Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* (both were based on comic French plays by Pierre Beaumarchais), *Barber* tells how Count Almaviva woos and eventually marries Rosina, a maiden cloistered by Doctor Bartolo (who aims to marry her himself), who gets freed through a series of schemes dreamed up by Almaviva’s barber Figaro.

Directed by Rosetta Cucchi at the Cutler Majestic Theater, *Barber* features Matthew Worth (BLO’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Così fan Tutte*) as Figaro, Daniela Mack in her BLO debut as Rosina, Jesus Garcia (BLO’s *La Bohème*) as Count Almaviva, and David Crawford as Basilio. Julia Noulin-Mérat and DM Wood return to BLO as scenic and lighting designers, respectively. Costume designer Gianluca Falaschi makes his BLO debut.

Boston Lyric Opera Music Director David Angus will conduct *Barber* and all productions in the 2018/19 Season. This marks a continued commitment by Angus to BLO, through a new three-year renewal of his contract with the company.

SCHOENBERG IN HOLLYWOOD, November 14-18, 2018

Composer Tod Machover and librettist Simon Robson’s *Schoenberg in Hollywood* – based on a scenario by Braham Murray – takes inspiration from the life of Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg after he fled Hitler’s Europe in the 1930s. After settling in Los Angeles by way of Boston, Schoenberg considered composing film music, rediscovered his heritage, and looked for ways to make his work accessible to a wider public. Machover says Schoenberg’s search to reconcile art with entertainment, reflection with action, and tradition with revolution, is “one of the most inspiring stories of our time.” The opera explores the humor, heroism and pathos of Schoenberg’s struggle, providing “a glimpse of what may have happened if Schoenberg had, indeed, reconciled those opposites,” he said.

Braham Murray directs *Schoenberg in Hollywood*. Long time Machover collaborator Omar Ebrahim plays the title role, joined by BLO Emerging Artist alumni Sara Womble and Jesse Darden playing multiple characters. Simon Higlett makes his BLO debut as scenic designer. Pablo Santiago and Nancy Leary return as lighting and costume designers, respectively. David Angus conducts.

“This story tackles a world gone to hell,” Nelson says. “It’s about an artist who has escaped that hell, then struggles with who and what he is to become. It asks the questions: ‘how does one continue to create after facing the abyss of human atrocity?’ And, ‘how do we find hope in a world that seems to be falling apart?’ It’s relevant and resonant. Tod has been on an intense creative journey himself with this work, trying to show how an artist deals with these issues,” Nelson says. “I think it is an artistic triumph.”

THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA, March 11-17, 2019

Benjamin Britten’s chamber opera is based on the ancient Roman tale of Lucretia (retold later in a poem by William Shakespeare) who remains faithful to her soldier husband Collatinus when the wives of his comrades Tarquinius and Junius do not. While fighting off a Greek invasion outside Rome, the soldiers learn that a colleague had returned to the city the night before and discovered many of the soldiers’ wives had been unfaithful. Enraged by the news of Lucretia’s honor in the face of his wife’s infidelity, Tarquinius is goaded into challenging her loyalty, rushes

back to Rome and enters her room while she sleeps. When met with Lucretia's refusal to submit to him, he rapes her. Collatinus returns home to comfort his wife.

Widely considered among his best compositions, *Lucretia* finds Britten working to reconcile the titular character's trauma with her refusal to be a victim, and her decision to take matters into her own hands. The opera was written at a time when issues of rape and its aftermath were not openly addressed. For that reason, the opera's sensitivity to Lucretia's experience, and her husband's response, is notable. In the age of the #MeToo and Time's Up movements that call out sexual aggression against women by powerful men, the disturbing narrative is both prescient and uncomfortably familiar.

"Women today are empowered to speak out about the inappropriate actions taken against them...about sexual crimes," Nelson says. "This opera humanizes the characters in the story and their motivations – focusing on Lucretia's move to control her destiny, addressing the impetus and impact of Tarquinius' actions, and showing the true emotional cost of its consequences."

David Angus conducts the production at Artist for Humanity's EpiCenter facility in Boston. Kelley O'Connor (BLO's *Madama Butterfly*) sings the role of Lucretia, Duncan Rock (BLO's 2015 *Don Giovanni*) plays Tarquinius, Nancy Maultsby (BLO's 2009 *Rusalka*) plays Bianca. Brandon Cedel (BLO's *La Bohème*) returns to BLO to play Collatinus, David McFerrin (BLO's *Burke & Hare*) sings Junius, and Jesse Darden and Antonia Tamer sing Male Chorus and Female Chorus, respectively. A director will be announced later.

THE HANDMAID'S TALE, May 3-11, 2019

The morality tale of *Lucretia* is broadened – and brought to an extreme – by Danish composer Poul Ruders and librettist Paul Bentley's monumental 2000 opera *The Handmaid's Tale*, based on the lauded novel by Canadian author Margaret Atwood and produced by BLO at a location to be announced later. Paired with *Lucretia*, *Handmaid's Tale* constitutes a spring season of mythological stories from which female characters emerge as moral and societal touchstones.

BLO commissioned a re-orchestrated score from Ruders and obtained permission to revise the opening and closing scenes. The story takes place in the Republic of Gilead, a dystopian society formed by American Christian fundamentalists who assassinate the President and construct a rigid class system for women. *The Handmaid's Tale* is anchored by Offred, a woman who rebels against the patriarchal rules through alliances and secretive friendships that she hopes will help uncover the fate of her husband and child, as well as preserve her story for future generations.

Ruders's score blends folkloric music and a sound world of hypnotic repetition, haunting choral singing, and stunning duets and trios that break tenets of traditional opera. *Handmaid's Tale* will be helmed by the Obie, Bessie and American Theater Wing award-winning director Anne Bogart, who serves as Co-Artistic Director of the SITI Company and has been a leader in theater education around the world for more than three decades.

The Handmaid's Tale will have one of BLO's largest principal casts in several seasons, and three dozen chorus members. Jennifer Johnson Cano (BLO's *Don Giovanni* and *Carmen* by Calixto Bieito) sings the pivotal role of Offred. Caroline Worra (BLO's *Greek, Agrippina, Lizzie Borden*) returns as Aunt Lydia. Maria Zifchak, in her BLO debut, is Serena Joy. Matthew DiBattista plays The Doctor. David Cushing is The Commander, and Michelle Trainor is Ofglen. Production artists will be announced later.

"This is a fascinating look at an American story through the eyes and ears of a Scandinavian composer, with music that sweeps audiences into the narrative," says Nelson. "Like great Nordic myths, the Massachusetts-centered story in *The Handmaid's Tale* is big and turns on a single savior. Together the music and this tale, set in an unconventional space and directed by a woman at the top of her skills – promises one of the grandest productions we have presented."

OFF-STAGE SUPPORT

The stories of *The Rape of Lucretia* and *The Handmaid's Tale* place issues of power, control and violence affecting women at the forefront. Esther Nelson says the Company saw an opportunity to create a platform for community dialogue about these issues by presenting the works side by side. BLO identified two leading partner organizations – the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center and Casa Myrna – to help drive that dialogue by supporting the Company with resources and community programming ideas that put the content of the shows in the proper context.

“Their work with us will range from providing training that strengthens our internal grasp of the issues such as intimate partner violence, to consulting on some artistic choices and organizational decisions that deal with the violence shown onstage,” Nelson says. “These collaborations will build the capacity to support our creative teams and our audience members who will have a variety of personal experiences with the issues at hand.”

Nelson believes such collaborations will have a positive impact on BLO and the industry overall. “By lifting women’s voices in the unique way only art can,” she said, “we begin to create awareness of the structural imbalances of stories within the opera canon. We create a path that address the interconnected issues—from gender and race, to violence and social justice—as we continue producing traditional works alongside contemporary operas that tackle issues of our time.”

TICKETS

Subscription packages for BLO’s 2018/19 Season are available now for current subscribers. Full-season, four-opera subscriptions begin at \$260, and will be available to the general public starting March 15. Two- and three-part subscription package, and individual ticket sales begin this spring. Ongoing sales and season updates, and subscription packages are available at BLO.org. Audience Services representatives are available Mon.-Fri, 10 am to 5 pm at 617-542-6772 or boxoffice@blo.org.

MEDIA CONTACT

For interviews about Boston Lyric Opera’s 2018/19 Season, contact John Michael Kennedy at jmk@jmkpr.com or 781-620-1761.

#