



BLO SPRING 2019: WOMEN DIRECTORS HELM STORIES OF REBELS AND DISSENTERS IN TWO INNOVATIVE NEW INSTALLATIONS

***THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA:** Sarna Lapine’s production brings timely echo to Britten’s masterwork.
THE HANDMAID’S TALE: Anne Bogart directs East Coast premiere of Ruders & Bentley’s take on Margaret Atwood’s vital story.*

BOSTON – January 24, 2019 – Boston Lyric Opera’s (BLO) season of rebels and dissenters continues into Spring 2019 with tales of strong women, helmed by women directors. BLO’s productions of *THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA* and *THE HANDMAID’S TALE* are startlingly relevant stories, both with extraordinary music, produced in distinctive non-traditional spaces. Artistic and General Director Esther Nelson says the spring season highlights stories in which female characters emerge as moral and societal touchstones.

BLO’s production of Benjamin Britten’s 1946 masterwork **THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA**, led by director **Sarna Lapine**, highlights the story’s modern resonance with an intimate, immersive staging that brings audience members into the drama. *Lucretia* will be presented March 11-17, 2019 at Artists for Humanity’s newly expanded EpiCenter facility in Fort Point.

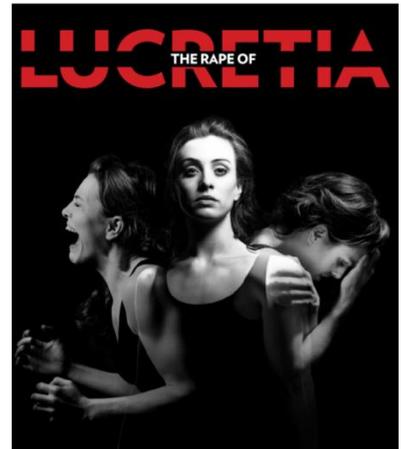
An adaptation of writer **Margaret Atwood**’s zeitgeist-grabbing novel **THE HANDMAID’S TALE** gets a new production May 5-12, 2019 at Harvard’s Lavietes Pavilion athletic facility, helmed by theater and opera director **Anne Bogart** with revised orchestration by composer Poul Ruders commissioned by BLO. The Lavietes Pavilion, a basketball gymnasium, stands in for Atwood’s fictional “Red Center” from her dystopian novel.

“This spring, Boston Lyric Opera tells urgent stories that are intimate productions like *Lucretia* -- with a small cast and a chamber ensemble -- or grand in scope like *Handmaid’s Tale* with its breathtaking source material and a thrilling, diverse score performed by a large chorus and orchestra.” Nelson says. “Both operas offer opportunities for modern-day discussions. To help spark those conversations, our season includes important community initiatives and valuable partnerships.”

The challenging subject matter this spring prompted BLO to work closely with community partners in Boston to help shape educational, informative and supportive programs for the public and the production teams. [See “Offstage Support” below.]

THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA, March 11-17, 2019

Benjamin Britten's chamber opera, sung to an English libretto by Ronald Duncan, is drawn from the history of ancient Rome and the tale of Lucretia. Rome is under Etruscan rule and the king's son Tarquinius leads a joint army in a battle against Greece. Aroused and challenged by stories of the unimpeachable virtue of Lucretia -- the wife of his Roman general, Collatinus -- Tarquinius rides back to the city and attempts to seduce her. When she rejects him, he rapes her. The next morning, she calls Collatinus back to witness her testimony and, in his presence, commits suicide. In the aftermath another general, Junius Brutus, uses Lucretia's accusation and self-sacrifice as a rallying cry against the Etruscans; a resulting popular uprising drives the occupiers from Rome. The monarchy is overthrown and the republic is formed.



The opera is considered among composer Britten's most skillful, concentrated and theatrical works. *Guardian* music critic Andrew Clements called it “a model of economy, creating a sound world of vivid evocation...interweaving self-contained numbers...” With librettist Duncan (who drew from a 1931 play by Andre Obey) Britten explores the brutal nature of political and sexual power, and casts Lucretia's trauma as an act of violence she turns on herself, in order to make public what Tarquinius's act has cost her.

“The myth of Lucretia is filled with complex and dramatic ambiguities, as well as disturbing moral and psychological interpretations that have fascinated numerous writers, painters, composers and philosophers for 2,500 years,” says director Sarna Lapine, who notes that the majority of depictions and interpretations have been rendered by men. “*The Rape of Lucretia* is a tragedy born of ancient Rome that would, perhaps, be easier to examine as an artifact of its time, were it not for its current resonance.”

David Angus conducts the production at Artist for Humanity's EpiCenter facility in Boston. **Kelley O'Connor** (BLO's 2012 *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 2015 *La Bohème*) returns to BLO to play Collatinus, **David McFerrin** (BLO's 2017 *Burke & Hare*) sings Junius, and **Jesse Darden** and **Antonia Tamer** sing Male Chorus and Female Chorus respectively.

Mikiko Suzuki MacAdams is set designer for *Lucretia*, **Robert Perdziola** designed the costumes, and lighting design is by **Joey Moro**.

Lapine is a New York-based director and developer of new work. In addition to helming the upcoming Kate Hamill adaptation of *Little Women* at Primary Stages, Lapine recently directed productions of *Noises Off* (Two River Theater), *Into the Woods* (Juilliard), *Frost/Nixon* (Bay Street Theater), *You Are Here*, a new musical (Goodspeed Musicals); *Photograph 51*, (Japan premiere at Umeda Arts Theater); *Sondheim on Sondheim* with the Boston Pops and the L.A. Phil; and the critically-acclaimed Broadway revival of *Sunday in the Park With George*, starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Annaleigh Ashford. Lapine directed the second national tour of Lincoln Center Theater's *South Pacific* and was Associate Director of The National Theatre's *WarHorse* for its North American Tour and its Japan production. She started out at Lincoln Center Theater as assistant director to Bartlett Sher on *The Light in the Piazza*. She worked with him on the Tony Award-winning revival of *South Pacific*, the new

musical *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, and Clifford Odets' *Awake and Sing!* She holds an MFA from Columbia University.

Lucretia performances are Mon Mar 11, 2019 @ 7:30pm; Wed Mar 13, 2019 @ 7:30pm; Fri Mar 15, 2019 @ 7:30pm; Sat Mar 16, 2019 @ 7:30pm; Sun Mar 17, 2019 @ 3:00pm

THE HANDMAID'S TALE, May 5-12, 2019



Danish composer Poul Ruders and librettist Paul Bentley's monumental 2000 opera *The Handmaid's Tale*, based on the novel by Canadian author Margaret Atwood, gets its East Coast debut in a new BLO production at Harvard's Lavietes Pavilion. *The Handmaid's Tale* will be helmed by Obie, Bessie and American Theater Wing award-winning director **Anne Bogart**, who serves as Co-Artistic Director of New York's SITI Company and has been a leader in theater education around the world for more than three decades.

Like the book and the hit television adaptation, the story of the opera takes place in 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 the story of Offred, a woman who rebels against theocratic patriarchal rules through alliances and secretive friendships, which she hopes will uncover the fate of her husband and child, and preserve her story for future generations. Stories of other handmaids, the tyrannical Aunts who run the Rachel and Leah Center, the men who control Gilead, and Offred's life in "the Time Before" complete the narrative.

BLO commissioned a re-orchestrated score from Ruders and obtained permission to rethink the opening and closing scenes from the 2000 work. The score blends folkloric music, a cinematic sound world of hypnotic and sometimes ominous repetition, moments of minimalism, haunting choral singing, and duets and trios that break tenets of traditional opera.

"Of all the projects I've ever done, this is the one that least needs an explanation of why we are doing it," said Bogart. "Every once in a while, a piece of literature, a fiction, or a painting becomes so meaningful to a culture that everyone pays attention, and the culture is changed because of it. In theater and in opera we create a democratic space with an audience watching something together that speaks to something on the collective mind. *The Handmaid's Tale* and the concerns it raises is on everyone's mind right now."

Bogart says her team envisions the production as an immersive audience experience, giving the gymnasium a detention center feel, with guards stationed around a brick-and-searchlight interior, and a large, three-quarter stage space that transforms into more than a dozen locations.

The Handmaid's Tale comprises one of BLO's largest principal casts in several seasons and includes nearly 40 chorus members. **Jennifer Johnson Cano** (BLO's 2015 production of *Don Giovanni* and 2016's *Carmen*) sings the pivotal role of Offred. **Caroline Worra** (BLO's 2016 *Greek*, 2010 *Agrippina* and 2013 *Lizzie Borden*) returns as Aunt Lydia. Metropolitan Opera regular **Maria Zifchak**, in her BLO debut, is Serena Joy. **Matthew DiBattista** plays The Doctor. **David Cushing** is the Commander, and **Michelle Trainor** is Ofglen.

David Angus conducts. Set and costume design is by **James Schuette**. Lighting design is by **Brian Scott**. **Adam Thompson** does projection and video design. Sound design is by **J Jumbelic** and movement direction is by **Shura Baryshnikov** (daughter of Mikhail Baryshnikov and Jessica Lange).

Bogart is Co-Artistic Director of the ensemble-based SITI Company, head of the MFA Directing program at Columbia University, and author of five books. With SITI, Bogart has directed more than 30 works in venues around the world. Her recent opera works include Handel's *Alcina*, Dvorak's *Dimitrij*, Kurt Weill's *Lost in the Stars*, Verdi's *Macbeth*, Bellini's *Norma*, and Bizet's *Carmen*. Her many awards and fellowships include three honorary doctorates (Cornish School of the Arts, Bard College and Skidmore College), a Duke Artist Fellowship, a United States Artists Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Rockefeller/Bellagio Fellowship and a Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Residency Fellowship.

The Handmaid's Tale *performances are Sun May 5, 2019 @ 3:00pm; Wed May 8, 2019 @ 7:30pm; Fri May 10, 2019 @ 7:30pm; Sun May 12, 2019 @ 3:00pm.*

OFF-STAGE SUPPORT

The Rape of Lucretia and *The Handmaid's Tale* include stories of women victimized for seizing control to change their destinies; they bring issues of power, control and violence affecting women to the forefront. Esther Nelson says Boston Lyric Opera 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 (BARCC) and Casa Myrna – to help drive that dialogue by providing resources and community programming ideas that put the content of the shows in the proper context.

“Their work with us will provide training that strengthens our internal grasp of the issues,” Nelson says. “and will help build capacity to support our creative teams, our staff, and our audience members who surely will have a variety of personal experiences with the issues at hand.”

BARCC representatives will be on hand at all *Lucretia* performances, to answer questions and provide context during post-show discussions on stage, provide support to anyone who feels affected by the production, and to give audience members guidance in accessing help for themselves or someone else.

TICKETS

Tickets to *The Rape of Lucretia* and *The Handmaid's Tale* are \$25-\$182, depending on performance and seat location. Tickets may be purchased online at www.blo.org/tickets, by phone at (617-542-6772, Mon.-Fri, 10 am to 5 pm) or by email at boxoffice@blo.org.

“Spring Duet” subscription packages start at \$90 for two productions, including all subscriber benefits.

A limited number of “BLO Book Club” packages, including discounted tickets to both shows, and copies of book club selections *The Power* (2017) by Naomi Alderman and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood are available now at www.blo.org/bookclub.

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MEDIA CONTACT and INFORMATION

For advance interviews, photo and video assets, and review tickets for Boston Lyric Opera's Spring 2019 Season, contact John Michael Kennedy at jmk@jmkpr.com or 781-620-1761.

- More information about *The Rape of Lucretia* is available at www.blo.org/lucretia.
- More information about *The Handmaid's Tale* is available at www.blo.org/handmaids.