



## **BLO's 2019/20 SEASON MIXES POWER AND POLITICS, SHOWCASING DIVERSE ARTISTS IN GREAT ROLES**

- General & Artistic Director Esther Nelson's 10<sup>th</sup> season spans 300 years of opera.*
- Following 2019 Met debut, soprano Elena Stikhina returns to BLO in Norma.*
- Company's first Pagliacci will be presented as an immersive community experience.*
- Local and international singers of varied backgrounds take starring roles.*

BOSTON – March 8, 2019 – Proving the enduring vibrancy and relevancy of the art form (while celebrating a milestone for its leader), Boston Lyric Opera's 2019/20 Season of new productions spans three centuries of composers -- focusing on works that reflect the highs and lows of power and politics, bringing passionate opera installations to new neighborhoods, and introducing audiences to rising stars from diverse backgrounds. Among the season highlights, Russian-born soprano **Elena Stikhina** returns to BLO, where she made her 2017 American debut, to sing the lead role in **NORMA**. Stanford Calderwood General & Artistic Director **Esther Nelson** marks her 10th programming season, which the company will commemorate throughout the year.



*Elena Stikhina*

"I'm excited by the breadth of the season, featuring grand traditional operas to adventurous installations, which reflects our commitment to our community." Nelson says. "We have a particularly strong and diverse lineup of talent this season, that showcases guest artists who perform regularly on major international stages, as well as our own Emerging Artists." BLO's 2019/20 Season includes:

### **PAGLIACCI**

**September 27 to October 6, 2019; location to be announced**

BLO's season opens with **Ruggiero Leoncavallo's** indelible **PAGLIACCI**, starring Mexico-born tenor **Rafael Rojas** as Canio and his murderous circus clown alter-ego of the title. African American soprano **Lauren Michelle**, an alumna of Walnut Hill School in Natick, Mass., and a finalist in 2015's BBC Cardiff Singer of the World contest, plays Nedda. **Tobias Greenhalgh** sings the role of Silvio, Nedda's lover. **Michael Mayes** (2016's *Carmen* and 2014's *Rigoletto*) returns as Tonio. BLO Emerging Artist alumnus **Omar Najmi** sings Beppe-Harlequin. BLO Music Director **David Angus** conducts.

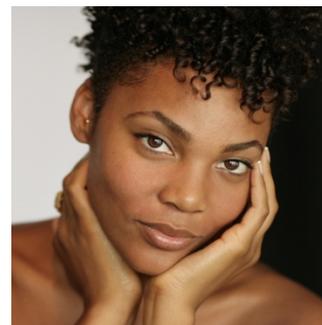


*Rafael Rojas*

*Pagliacci*, written in 1892, will be sung in English and Italian. **David Lefkowich** directs the opera and the complete immersive experience, with food, music and acrobats, mirroring the carnival atmosphere that sets the storyline in motion. The production underscores the play-within-a-play plot of a traveling group of actors who act out

their own melodramatic version of a traditional love-triangle plot. Local community choruses and singers (plus on-site audience members) will be tapped to participate in the event and the performance alongside BLO's professional chorus.

"*Pagliacci* is a quintessential opera...and I'm delighted to produce it for the first time at BLO," Nelson says. "The music is direct and filled with sweeping melodic passion. At its heart is a jealous, abusive husband driven to murder his unfaithful young wife. But the dramatic backdrop is far more complex, frequently blurring the line between acting and reality. It is a perfect opera to bring together and celebrate our community partnerships. Rafael Rojas and Lauren Michelle will bring chemistry and excitement to our stage as the doomed couple."



Lauren Michelle

## **FELLOW TRAVELERS**

**November 13-17, 2019 at Emerson Paramount Center**

BLO's deep bench of Emerging Artists is featured with returning artist Jesse Blumberg in the New England premiere of composer **Gregory Spears** and librettist **Greg Pierce's** 2016 opera **FELLOW TRAVELERS**. This taut



Jesse Blumberg

political thriller is based on Thomas Mallon's 2007 historical novel of faith, love, and politics during the McCarthy era, when homosexuals were blackmailed and purged from U.S. government positions. In the shadow of 1950s anti-Communist hysteria, powerful State Department executive Hawkins "Hawk" Fuller seduces Washington, DC transplant Timothy Laughlin, sparking a furtive romance after securing him a speechwriting job. Hawkins' circle of friends and colleagues may—or may not—be keeping his secret from the prying eyes of the House Un-American Activities Committee.



Jesse Darden

*Fellow Travelers* will be directed by Minnesota-based **Peter Rothstein**, artistic director of Theater Latte Da, whose own docu-musical *All is Calm*, made its off-Broadway debut last year. San Francisco-based conductor **Emily Senturia** leads the BLO orchestra. BLO's 2018 Principal Artist in Residence **Jesse Darden** (2018's *Schoenberg in Hollywood*) stars as Timothy alongside **Jesse Blumberg** (2017's *Burke & Hare*) as Hawk. **James Maddalena** (seen most recently in 2017's *Tosca* and 2018's *The Threepenny Opera*) sings several roles including a Senator, a General and a bartender. Emerging Artist alumni cast members include **Chelsea Basler**, **Vincent Turregano**, **David McFerrin**, **Simon Dyer** and **Michelle Trainor**.

"*Fellow Travelers* is a love story set in a troubling time of American history," Nelson says. "In the name of national security and against so-called 'anti-American activities,' American lives were needlessly ruined and promising careers were ended. For this opera, I'm particularly proud to showcase so many BLO Emerging Artists and alumni."

## **NORMA**

**March 13-22, 2020 at Emerson Cutler Majestic Theatre**

Russia-born soprano **Elena Stikhina** made her American debut in Boston Lyric Opera's 2017 *Tosca* and a critically lauded Metropolitan Opera debut late last year in Puccini's *Il Trittico*. Next season she makes her role debut at BLO as the title character in **Vincenzo Bellini's** 1831 *bel canto* opera, **NORMA**, best known for its popular aria "Casta Diva (Chaste Goddess)." Set in first-century B.C. Gaul, the story recounts a love triangle between Norma, a high priestess of the Druids, Pollione a high-ranking Roman official, and Adalgisa, a Druid-temple virgin whom Pollione takes as a lover. Against the background of a civil uprising that she instigates, Norma works to convince Pollione to leave Adalgisa and return to her.



Alfred Walker

The notoriously challenging title role has been sung by many great voices including Maria Callas, Dame Joan Sutherland, Montserrat Caballé, Renata Scotta and Beverly Sills (in the Opera Company of Boston’s 1971 production under Sarah Caldwell). African American bass-baritone **Alfred Walker** (seen in BLO’s 2013 *The Flying Dutchman* and recently named to play Crown in the Metropolitan Opera’s 2019/2020 production of *Porgy and Bess*) returns to BLO as Norma’s father, Oroveso. **Jonathan Burton** (BLO’s 2017 *Tosca*) returns as Pollione, and BLO favorite **Sandra Piques-Eddy** (*Werther*, 2016 and *Katya Kabanova*, 2015) returns as Adalgisa. **Stephanie Havey** (Assistant Director for BLO’s 2014 *Rigoletto*) returns as Stage Director. Music Director David Angus will lead the BLO Orchestra.

“Bellini’s long melodies and hypnotizing musical phrases, which so directly articulate the unfolding dramatic events, are as alluring today as they were nearly 190 years ago,” says Nelson. “The story has plenty to say about the abuse of power. But the headline here, as throughout the season, is the singers. Elena Stikhina will be electrifying in this role. Her *Tosca* for BLO was superb, and her Met debut garnered enthusiasm and an extended standing ovation. To have her, Alfred Walker, Jonathan Burton and Sandra Piques-Eddy return will thrill audiences.”

**GIULIO CESARE**

**May 8-17, 2020; location to be announced**

**G. F. Handel’s** 1760 work **GIULIO CESARE**, BLO’s first Baroque opera since 2011’s *Agrippina*, closes the 2019/20 Season in a production directed by **Matthew Ozawa**. With a libretto by **Nicola Francesco Haym**, this opera, like *Norma*, takes its story from first-century B.C. Rome -- this time by way of Egypt with Caesar’s and Cleopatra’s entangled love story. The work is conducted by **Gary Thor Wedow**, a Baroque music master with an historically informed style heard previously in BLO’s *Agrippina*, who leads the BLO orchestra, which will include period instruments.

Canadian counter-tenor **David Trudgen** (BLO’s 2010 *Agrippina*)—also well-versed in the Handel repertoire—sings the title role. Boston native and New England Conservatory graduate **Jacquelyn Stucker**, whose vibrant European career includes a recent two-year engagement with the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden, sings Cleopatra. Making his BLO debut is South Korean counter-tenor **Siman Chung** as boy-king Tolomeo. Canada’s **Wallis Giunta**, winner of 2018’s International Opera Awards “Young Singer of the Year” award makes her Boston debut singing *en travesti* as Sesto Pompeo. Emerging Artist alumni **Simon Dyer** (2017’s *The Rake’s Progress*) and **David McFerrin** (2018’s *Burke & Hare* and the current *The Rape of Lucretia*) return to the company singing General Curio and Achilla, respectively. **Renee Tatum** (2018’s *The Threepenny Opera*) is Cornelia.



Jacquelyn Stucker

“GIULIO CESARE is based loosely on Caesar’s fateful meeting in Egypt with the rebellious Cleopatra,” Nelson says. “What evolves is one of the most entertaining examples of *opera seria*, with larger-than-life characters performing some of the genre’s most passionate, intoxicating, mischievous, and majestic arias that narrate the love story of Caesar and Cleopatra. These roles demand singers with extraordinary vocal capabilities and our cast will excel in them, especially under the baton of Gary Wedow.”

GIULIO CESARE, NORMA and PAGLIACCI will be designed by a single team of artists: Set Designer **Julia Noulin-Mérat**, Costume Designer **Charles Neumann** and Lighting Designer **Pablo Santiago**. Previously the three worked separately on successful BLO productions and collaborated on 2018’s *Threepenny Opera*.

## **#EN10 – A DECADE WITH ESTHER NELSON**

Esther Nelson took the reins at BLO in the 2008/09 Season, but began programming the 2009/10 Season—the first with her artistic stamp—by bucking a national, recession-fueled trend toward down-sizing. Instead, she added a contemporary production to the season that brought the company out of the theater and into the community, a practice that continues today. Known as “Opera Annex,” the move was greeted with critical acclaim for its adventurous programming.



*Esther Nelson*

Since then, “Opera Annex” has advanced to become a commissioning program that produces internationally recognized works and has focused industry attention on BLO as a regional company with a national impact. Soon after, Nelson introduced the “Emerging Artist” initiative that has nurtured the burgeoning careers of numerous singers and musicians who have gone on to national and international careers. Her desire to link opera with other arts institutions throughout Boston led to the development of the “Signature Series” with artistic, musical, and educational collaborations with the Museum of Fine Arts, the Boston Athenaeum, and others. Her commitment to community collaboration has strengthened and deepened the Company’s outreach work.

Nelson spent the first year of her tenure rethinking the artistic, administrative, fundraising and organizational positioning of Boston Lyric Opera. Changes throughout her time at BLO have strengthened many aspects of the company including a business-related move from its long-term rental home that became an artistic and production catalyst resulting in sold-out performances and the strongest reviews in its recent history. Nelson has navigated BLO to a solid financial footing that helped the company end its last eight fiscal years with surpluses, and a growing endowment.

“BLO and Boston have benefitted greatly from Esther’s 10 years of intensely professional leadership,” says BLO Board President Michael J. Puzo. “On stage and off, today’s BLO bears witness to Esther’s vision and her commitment to bring the beauty and passion of this art form to an increasingly diverse and enthusiastic community. She remained steadfast in setting BLO on a sound financial foundation, while also building a team that has brought BLO to new artistic heights. Personally, it is a pleasure to work with Esther and to know that, with our continuing support, her tenure at BLO will rightly be seen as having marked a new birth of opera in Boston.”

In addition to ongoing recognition of Nelson’s tenure, the company’s annual gala will celebrate Nelson’s decade at the helm.

### **SUBSCRIPTION TICKETS**

Full season subscriptions for BLO’s 2019/20 Season will go on sale on Friday, March 8th. Subscriptions are available online at [www.blo.org](http://www.blo.org), or through BLO Audience Services Monday-Friday from 10AM-5PM at (617.542.6772) and ([boxoffice@blo.org](mailto:boxoffice@blo.org)).

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### **MEDIA INFORMATION**

For additional information, or interviews about the BLO 2019/20 Season, contact John Michael Kennedy at [jmk@jmkpr.com](mailto:jmk@jmkpr.com) or 781-620-1761.

### **PRODUCTION NOTES**

*The original production and staging of “Fellow Travelers” is by Peter Rothstein. Scenery and properties are designed by Sara Brown. Costumes are by Trevor Bowen. The scenery, properties and costumes for this production were constructed by Minnesota Opera Shops and are owned by Minnesota Opera.*