

BOSTON **LYRIC** **OPERA**

OPERA FOR THE MODERN WORLD

A NEW SEASON

LIVE OPERA RETURNS THIS FALL, ALONGSIDE CINEMATIC INNOVATIONS THAT MAKE BLO AN INDUSTRY-LEADING PRODUCER

Three new productions anchor an on-stage and on-screen season.

J'Nai Bridges stars in "Cavalleria Rusticana" live on stage in October.

Deborah Voigt's 1991 BLO debut, "Ariadne auf Naxos," available today on operabox.tv.

BOSTON – MAY 20, 2021 – Boston Lyric Opera's (BLO) 2021/22 Season marks a return to live, on-stage opera, and continuation of the company's on-screen programming throughout the year. The new season is anchored by three new productions, and return of the BLO Street Stage, which brings live music to communities throughout the region.

Acting General & Artistic Director **Bradley Vernatter** says the company has rethought the traditional notion of an opera season. "BLO is an active, year-round member of this community," he says, "and we will make classical and contemporary operas accessible 365 days a year," he says. "Audiences will be able to experience live performances in Boston and its surrounding communities, alongside BLO's growing cinematic repertoire on our operabox.tv platform. From next month's premiere of 'desert in' to classics like 'Cavalleria Rusticana' and 'Ariadne auf Naxos,' the breadth and diversity of our programming offer the full palette of what opera can be, and more accurately reflect our community onstage and onscreen."

After internal reflection, and discussions with Company leadership and the original creative team, BLO has changed previously announced plans to mount a new production of Puccini's "Madama Butterfly." Vernatter says the change reaffirms BLO's commitment to creating inclusive environments and intentional storytelling for its audiences and its artists. He says BLO will embark on a year-long process "to examine how we can engage more thoughtfully and responsibly with the music, dramaturgy, and modern cultural implications of 'Butterfly.'"

"In considering our planned production of 'Butterfly,' it became clear this is not the moment for BLO to present a theatricalized version of the opera," Vernatter said. "We recognize this piece

remains a masterwork, and for good reason, but we are taking responsibility to unpack the layers of this story -- particularly as they relate to appropriation, race and gender stereotypes. BLO remains committed to employing our previously engaged 'Butterfly' artists, and engaging with them in a thoughtful way around the opera."

THREE NEW PRODUCTIONS

Cavalleria Rusticana

Boston Lyric Opera's fall season opens with "**Cavalleria Rusticana**," by Pietro Mascagni, and librettists Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti and Guido Menasci. "Cavalleria" is a story of four lovers that centers on a returning soldier who finds his fiancée has married a different man. "Cavalleria" is loved for its passionate story and classic score, whose swooning "Intermezzo" is heard on numerous cinematic soundtracks.



Mezzo-soprano **J'Nai Bridges** (l., photo by S. Richards Photography) makes her BLO debut -- and role debut -- as Santuzza. **Alfred Walker**, most recently cast as Oroveso in BLO's pandemic-shuttered production of "Norma," is Alfio. **Sarna Lapine** (BLO's "The Rape of Lucretia") will direct. BLO Music Director **David Angus** will conduct. "Cavalleria" will be performed October 1, 3, 8 and 10, 2021 at the Emerson Cutler Majestic Theatre.

"We are so fortunate to have J'Nai with us at this point in her career, particularly with her interest in debuting this role," Angus says. "I've always admired her voice and stage presence, and had the pleasure of working with her on a production of 'Carmen' when she was in the Young American Artist Program at Glimmerglass Festival. J'Nai was a very exciting performer, a big star amongst the young singers there. I am very much looking forward to working with her again, ten years later."

The one-act opera will be presented in an intermission-free production designed to ensure the safest possible artist and audience experience. For similar reasons "Cavalleria" will feature live singing from onstage principal artists, accompanied by a new, live recording of the score by the BLO Orchestra and Chorus. Vernatter says the in-person experience of the music will leverage BLO's years of expertise optimizing sound environments in non-traditional spaces, and its recent move to create sonically lush music for its digital streaming service, operabox.tv.

Champion

A new production of **Terence Blanchard's "Champion: An Opera in Jazz,"** with a libretto by Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning playwright **Michael Cristofer**, comes to the Emerson Cutler Majestic Theatre stage on May 18, 20 and 22, 2022, rescheduled from its previously planned 2021 slot.

“Champion” is the story of boxer Emile Griffith, a welter-weight prizefighter born in the U.S. Virgin Islands, whose early life and career as a hat-maker are upended when he is drawn into boxing by a promoter. Living a double life as a married athlete and a gay man, Griffith is taunted by prizefight opponent Benny Paret. Griffith pummels Paret, winning the fight but learning later his opponent has died from his injuries.

Cast members in “Champion” include **Gordon Hawkins** as Emile, **Chris Kenney** as Young Emile, **Tichina Vaughn** as Griffith’s mother Emelda, and **Ariana Wehr** as Cousin Blanche and Sadie Griffith. Canadian-born conductor **Kwamé Ryan** conducts the score, which blends jazz and operatic elements. “Champion” will be performed at the Emerson Cutler Majestic Theatre.

Svadba

A new made-for-the-screen production of JUNO Award-winning composer **Ana Sokolović’s** one-act *a cappella* opera, “**Svadba**,” comes to BLO’s operabox.tv streaming service in early 2022. **Shura Baryshnikov**, who served as Movement Director for BLO’s productions of “The Handmaid’s Tale” and “Norma,” will direct the film.

Described by *Opera Canada* magazine as “a soaring, climactic, surprisingly moving farewell to girlhood that radiates both purity and courage,” “Svadba” (Serbian for *wedding*) takes place the evening before a wedding, as a bride and her five girlfriends navigate the fun, serious and sometimes silly rituals that surround a life-changing event.

OPERABOX.TV

BLO’s industry-leading streaming service operabox.tv provided much of the company’s innovation during the pandemic, with original and commissioned productions such as the internationally acclaimed animated feature “The Fall of the House of Usher,” and next month’s premiere of the eight-part opera miniseries “desert in.” Both productions and previously available operabox.tv content will remain available to subscribers, and on-demand, into the next season.



New for the 2021/22 Season, and available today, operabox.tv subscribers can access an iconic performance from BLO’s history: the 1991 production of “**Ariadne auf Naxos**” that starred and launched the career of American soprano **Deborah Voigt** (l., photo by Michael Romanos). Seen and heard for the first time in 30 years, the production debuts on operabox.tv in a full restoration. Additional content with Voigt will be available later on operabox.tv, and future 30th anniversary events are planned for this fall.

With free, on-demand and subscription-only offerings that include original musical programs, holiday specials, a talk series about racial justice in classical music, audio podcasts and more, operabox.tv has become a destination platform for original BLO programming, locally produced music projects, and on-screen works from opera companies around the world.

2021/22 Operabox.tv Line Up

Boston Lyric Opera's operabox.tv streaming service provides new content throughout the year, for subscribers (\$99/year), available on-demand (starting at \$5), and free to the public at www.operabox.tv. Current and upcoming offerings include:

- "Svadba" – coming early 2022;
- "desert in" – coming June 2021;
- "Ariadne auf Naxos (1991)" – available now;
- "The Fall of the House of Usher" full-length film – available now;
- "Retro+ Short Cuts" music videos – available now, free on demand;
- "A Winter's Evening" holiday special – available now for subscribers;
- "We Need to Listen" talk series – available now, free on demand;
- "At its (s)core" podcast series – available now, free on demand;
- Partner programs from regional, national and international opera companies;
- Programming extras including behind-the-scenes content; and
- Free public programs.

STREET STAGE

BLO Street Stage debuted in the fall of 2020, and quickly became a platform for Boston artists to offer beautiful music as well as hope, healing and joy through live performance. Seen to date in Boston's Financial District/Rose Kennedy Greenway, West End, South End, and Fenway, neighborhoods, as well as the communities of Harvard, Lincoln and Brockton, Mass., BLO Street Stage will continue its regional performance schedule this fall and next spring.

LOOKING AHEAD

BLO has sights set on programming future seasons of live performance too. BLO announces today a new production of Giacomo Puccini's "**La Bohème**," scheduled for the 2022/23 Season, co-produced with Michigan Opera Theater (MOT) and directed by its Artistic Director **Yuval Sharon**.

This take on the Puccini classic will be performed in reverse order -- starting with Act IV and ending with Act I. In MOT's recent announcement of the production, which it will stage in April 2022, Sharon said the unconventional project "brings hope from tragedy, life from death, and love from loneliness." The so-called "backwards Bohème" is shaped by two BLO Artistic Advisors: **John Conklin** will design the production; and **Vimbayi Kaziboni** will conduct.

"We believe arts organizations will emerge from the pandemic seeking strong collaborations, with a renewed emphasis to look more closely at the traditional repertory, and to find new ways to tell these stories," Vernatter says. "I am thrilled to forge a new partnership with Michigan Opera Theatre for this refreshed classic, and especially pleased that John and Vimbayi play pivotal roles along with Yuval Sharon. BLO's strong recent history of rethinking and remounting the classics in fresh ways has brought forth some of our best work; joining with MOT allows us to dream bigger and captivate audiences in two cities."

SUBSCRIPTIONS and TICKETS

Subscriptions for new and renewing subscribers are available now for BLO's 2021/22 Season, with "early bird" rates through June 30. Subscribers get access to performances of "Cavalleria Rusticana" and "Champion," as well as a full-year operabox.tv subscription and immediate access to "Ariadne auf Naxos," "desert in" and all current content on operabox.tv. Subscribers get advance access to BLO offerings including early options to buy "La Bohème" tickets when they go on sale next spring.

Individual/single tickets will be available starting in August 2021. More information is available at BLO.org.

SEASON FUNDING

Boston Lyric Opera's production of *Champion* is funded, in part, by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. BLO has received support for its 2021/22 Season from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

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MEDIA CONTACT INFORMATION

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