

BOSTONLYRICOPERA

UP UNTIL NOW

ARTISTS DOING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE. JOYFUL. OPEN. VITAL.

OPERA ARIAS REINTERPRETED, EXPANDED WITH ASL IN SHORT-FILM SERIES “SOUL(SIGNS): OPERA”

Commissioned by Boston Lyric Opera, Opera Omaha, Opera Columbus, and Portland Opera; produced by New York artist collective UP UNTIL NOW

Series debuts today, [exclusively on BLO's operabox.tv](https://operabox.tv)



Behind the scenes at the filming of "What Makes a Man a Man"
Photo courtesy Up Until Now

BOSTON – April 20, 2022 – In its ongoing exploration of new ways to enhance the artistic expression of opera, **Boston Lyric Opera** (BLO) launches today a series of short films produced by New York-based artist collective **UP UNTIL NOW** called “**SOUL(SIGNS): OPERA**.” The series centers American Sign Language (ASL) as both a medium and a new language through which to interpret opera and bring it to new audiences. The series was commissioned by BLO with **Opera Omaha**, **Opera Columbus** and **Portland Opera**.

UP UNTIL NOW (UUN) is a diverse group of artistic collaborators from the Deaf and hearing communities whose work combines ASL, music and striking cinematic visuals to animate, and enhance, appreciation of music. Their first ASL music video series, “SOUL(SIGNS): AN ASL PLAYLIST” featured films of iconic songs by Black female musicians such as “Georgia,” an interpretation of Gladys Knight and the Pips’ “Midnight Train to Georgia” that spread quickly around the internet, garnering national press attention and showing on 80+ screens in Times Square last summer, part of the Midnight Moment Series.

For “SOUL(SIGNS): OPERA,” new audio recordings of three opera arias became the basis of films conceived by the UUN team, led by co-founders **Brandon Kazen-Maddox** and **Kevin Newbury**. The first film, which starts streaming today, free and exclusively on BLO’s operabox.tv, features baritone **Markel Reed** singing “What Makes a Man a Man” from *Champion: An Opera in Jazz* by composer **Terence Blanchard** and librettist **Michael Cristofer**. Reed plays the character Young Emile Griffith in BLO’s live production of *Champion* May 18-22.

[Watch “What Makes a Man a Man” on operabox.tv here.](https://operabox.tv)

The other two films in the series are based on “His Name is Jan” from **Missy Mazzoli** and **Royce Vavrek**’s *Breaking the Waves* (sung by soprano **Kiera Duffy**, who originated the role of Bess), and a medley of “Der Vogelfänger bin ich ja” and “Pa-Pa-Pa-Papageno” from **W.A. Mozart**’s *The Magic Flute* (sung by bass-baritone **John Taylor Ward** and countertenor **Jordan Rutter** in a queer reimaging of the storyline). Both will premiere May 4.

On-screen cast members in the series include renowned Deaf actors **Monique Holt**, **Dickie Hearts** and **Andrew Morrill** (all of whom served as Directors of Artistic Sign Language for the series), along with Kazen-Maddox, **Seth Gore**, **Zavier Sabio** and **Alberto Medero**. The videos are directed by Kazen-Maddox, Newbury and **James Matthew Daniel**, and co-produced by **Kim Whitener**.

The series is available on Boston Lyric Opera’s operabox.tv through May 2022 with distribution later through Opera Omaha’s 2022-2023 season.

ABOUT UP UNTIL NOW COLLECTIVE

Formed in the Summer of 2020 at the height of the pandemic, UP UNTIL NOW gathers artists together to make work that is joyful, open, and challenging. Founded by Brandon Kazen-Maddox, **Jecca Barry**, **Marcus Shields** and Kevin Newbury, UUN is committed to inclusive, accessible and equitable working environments. UUN develops and produces new interdisciplinary work that explores empathy, intimacy, and community, and seeks to challenge the status quo by building new structures for artistic creation. [More information about UP UNTIL NOW can be found here.](#)

ABOUT BLO

The mission of Boston Lyric Opera is to build curiosity, enthusiasm, and support for opera by creating musically and theatrically compelling productions, events, and educational resources for the Boston community and beyond. Locally and beyond, Boston Lyric Opera leads the way in celebrating the art of the voice through innovative programming and community engagement initiatives that redefine the opera-going experience. Now in its 44th Season, BLO is the largest and longest-lived opera company in New England. [More information about BLO can be found here.](#)

ABOUT OPERA OMAHA

Opera Omaha is a growth-minded, high energy, and innovative company with a demanding mission: producing opera performances in multiple formats and styles and co-creating artist-led programs for a variety of community service organizations. We believe the power of opera is transformational, and as a result supports the creation of an inventive, creative, empathetic, and inclusive community that inspires joy, self-discovery, kinder discourse, and opportunity for all. [More information about Opera Omaha can be found here.](#)

ABOUT OPERA COLUMBUS

Under the vision of General Director + CEO Julia Noulin-Mérat, Opera Columbus is redefining and reimaging the concept of regional opera with world-class productions that celebrate

extraordinary talent and artistic partnerships, engaging a new, diverse audience for this most magnificent of art forms. From groundbreaking collaborations to innovative and breathtaking productions, Opera Columbus is passionate about creating artistic moments for each and every patron. Opera Columbus's slogan, "Make It Yours," demonstrates the company's commitment to inclusivity, and invites everyone in the community to join with us. For more information, visit www.OperaColumbus.org.

ABOUT PORTLAND OPERA

Portland Opera gathers and inspires audiences, artists and collaborators to create shared opera experiences that enliven and connect us all, enhancing the cultural landscape of the beautiful Pacific Northwest. Learn more about the company's mission and vision, as well as the constellation of values that guides their work, at portlandopera.org.

#

MEDIA CONTACTS

- [Additional behind-the-scenes photos of the making of "What Makes a Man a Man" are available here.](#)
- For information on Boston Lyric Opera's commissioning of "**SOUL(SIGNS): OPERA**," interviews about the company's commitment to new roads for opera, and assets from the project, contact **John Michael Kennedy** at jmk@jmkpr.com or 781-620-1761.
- For information on UP UNTIL NOW Collective and its productions, contact **Kevin Newbury** at kevin@upuntilnowcollective.com.