

# BOSTON LYRIC OPERA

## AN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE *ROMEO AND JULIET* FREE ON THE BOSTON COMMON LAUNCHES AN EXPANDED BOSTON LYRIC OPERA SEASON AUGUST 11 and 13

Partnership with Commonwealth Shakespeare Company (CSC) and the City of Boston yields a production accessible to everyone.

Charles Gounod's operatic setting of the Shakespeare classic features artists making company debuts, and Boston-trained singers.

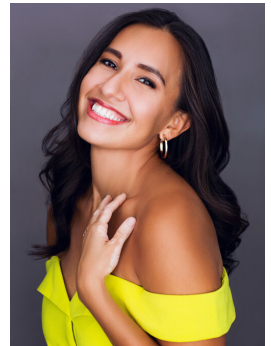
Ricardo Garcia and Vanessa Becerra play the young lovers; CSC's Steven Maler directs.

Production marks 20 years since BLO's last Common appearance, 2002's "Carmen."

BOSTON, Mass. – June 29, 2022 – A free, public opera adaptation of *Romeo & Juliet* on the historic Boston Common opens [Boston Lyric Opera's](#) 2022/23 Season with two performances August 11 and 13 at 8PM. Based on **Charles Gounod's** 1867 musical setting of the classic drama with a libretto by **Jules Barbier** and **Michel Carré**, and an English translation by **Edmund Tracey**, the production is co-presented in partnership with [Commonwealth Shakespeare Company](#) (CSC) and the City of Boston.



**Ricardo Garcia** (l.) makes his BLO company debut as Romeo; Boston Conservatory at Berklee alumna **Vanessa Becerra** (r., *photo by Coco Jourdana*) is Juliet. CSC Artistic Director **Steven Maler** will direct the production and BLO Music Director **David Angus** will lead the BLO Orchestra and Chorus. The performance, sung in English with surtitles, coincides with the 20-year anniversary of BLO's last free Boston Common show, "Carmen."



Considered alongside Giuseppe Verdi's *Otello* and *Falstaff*, and more recently Brett Dean's *Hamlet* as among the most successful opera adaptations of Shakespeare, Gounod's *Romeo & Juliet* highlights the story's most operatic plot points: young lovers forbidden to be together and finding love against the odds, only to perish at their own hands. The story inspired more than two dozen opera treatments but Gounod's lush music – in love duets like the one sung the morning after the young lovers' first night together, arias like Juliet's well-known waltz and Romeo's passionate Act II declaration of love, and the scene-setting orchestral interludes and dramatic choral moments – ensures his version a place of continued prominence.

### THE PRODUCTION

The libretto compresses Shakespeare's storyline and cuts the number of roles nearly in half. The result is a brisk tale that moves from the rivalry between the Capulets and Montagues to

the masked ball where the title characters meet and fall in love, through the lovers' surreptitious courting and marriage, the street fight that sheds both families' blood, and the tragic finale in Juliet's tomb.

BLO Acting Stanford Calderwood General and Artistic Director **Bradley Vernatter** says the production draws distinctively on the strengths of both artistic institutions, and results in a unique version that blends the talents and storytelling of each. This opera production, for example, adds two actors to the staging who perform spoken text from the original play and add some of Shakespeare's sonnets for context and texture.

"This bold interpretation of the classic tale of star-crossed lovers, told under a starry New England sky, celebrates the rich legacy of this opera in a modern context," Vernatter says. "In collaboration with our friends at CSC, we are creating something completely unique for our city, something neither company could make on its own. These performances demonstrate the creative power of the performing arts in Boston and the importance of coming together as a community."

Stage Director **Steven Maler** says the production is inspired by busker culture – and comprises a gathering of street musicians, singers and actors whose desire to entertain in public makes for surprising and spontaneous moments of joy. Performers play on three stage levels, with the full 47-piece orchestra in view and a 20-plus-member chorus enhancing scenes like the masked ball, the town plaza and others.

"CSC's vision has always been to bring performances to the people's park, the Boston Common, this shared public space and the nation's oldest park," Maler says. "Democratizing art is central to our mission. Early opera, like Shakespeare's work, was populist in its time...vital and vibrant parts of the culture. I am happy we can do artistic collaborations with partners like BLO, which continues to democratize their artform and make it more accessible."

## **CASTING AND ARTISTIC TEAM**

The casting for *Romeo & Juliet* mixes company debuts with returning artists and artists whose musical training took place in Boston. Boston Conservatory at Berklee (BC@B) alumna and soprano **Vanessa Becerra** stars as Juliet, BC@B alum mezzo-soprano **Mack Wolz** (BLO's 2022 operabox.tv film, "Svadba") portrays Stéphano, tenor **Ricardo Garcia** is Romeo, BLO Emerging Artist alumnus and tenor **Omar Najmi** sings Tybalt, incoming Emerging Artist and tenor **Fred C. VanNess Jr.** portrays Paris, Rhode Island-born mezzo-soprano and BLO Chorus member **Arielle Rogers-Wilkey** sings Gertrude, and bass **Joshua Conyers** (seen recently in Odyssey Opera's *Malcolm X* at the Strand Theater) is Lord Capulet. Emerging Artist **Nicholas LaGesse** (2022's *Champion*) sings Mercutio, BLO Chorus member and incoming Emerging Artist baritone **Junhan Choi** is Gregorio, Berklee College of Music instructor and bass **Philip Lima** sings the role of Friar Laurence. Some singing roles have been changed or cut to accommodate a two-hour runtime. Additional casting will be announced later.

The *Romeo & Juliet* artistic and creative team includes conductor **David Angus**, stage director **Steven Maler**, dramaturg **John Conklin**, production and lighting designer **Eric Southern**, and costume designer **Nancy Leary**. Additional artistic team members will be announced later.

## SEATING AND ACCESS

*Romeo & Juliet* will be performed on the Commonwealth Shakespeare Company stage, located north of the Parkman Bandstand in the Boston Common. MBTA access is at the Green Line Boylston Street stop, and the Red Line Park Street stop.

Audience members may bring blankets and chairs, or can rent chairs on site for \$10. Picnics are permitted at the show. **The *Romeo & Juliet* runtime is 2 hours.**

The Boston Common is accessible. For help with special seating or mobility and access needs, BLO Audience Services can be reached at 617.542.6772 or [boxoffice@blo.org](mailto:boxoffice@blo.org).

Digital programs will be available in advance at [blo.org](http://blo.org). Weather alerts and other updates about *Romeo & Juliet* are available by signing up [here](#).

A limited number of reserved seats are available in the Friends Section with a donation of \$100 per seat to Boston Lyric Opera. Visit [blo.org](http://blo.org) for details.

## SPONSORS

Community events for this season, including this free presentation of *Romeo and Juliet*, are sponsored, in part, by the Cabot Family Charitable Trust. The 2022/23 Season is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency, and by the Boston Cultural Council/Reopen Creative Boston Fund administered by the Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture. David Angus is sponsored this season by Linda Cabot Black.

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## MEDIA CONTACT

Advance interviews about this production of *Romeo & Juliet* are available, along with photos and bios of the artists and other information. Press seating is available at both performances. For information and access, contact **Jennifer Astin** at [ja@jmkpr.com](mailto:ja@jmkpr.com) or 323-444-1718.