

BLO

BOSTONLYRICOPERA

A Timeless Story
of Loss & Love

LA BOHÈME

SEP 23 – OCT 2 | Emerson Colonial Theatre

A TIME-FLIPPED LA BOHÈME MOVES FROM TRAGEDY TO LOVE, REIMAGINING THE CLASSIC WITH MUSIC AND TEXT INTACT

Yuval Sharon's reverse-order production, a hit at Spoleto USA, puts the last act first.

"We move backward, so our audience can move forward." – Director Yuval Sharon



BOSTON – August 18, 2022 – This fall Boston Lyric Opera mounts a new time-flipped production of **Giacomo Puccini's LA BOHÈME** by visionary director **Yuval Sharon** that opens with the opera's tragic ending and moves backward in time to the carefree depiction of Parisian artists in love. The production opens at the Emerson Colonial Theatre in a new arrangement with Ambassador Theatre Group. **LA BOHÈME** runs September 23 to October 2, 2022.

A startlingly simple idea yields a new perspective on a tried-and-true opera favorite. Sharon's production reorients Puccini's story from tragedy back to love by transposing the final act to the beginning and running the story in reverse. Each act retains, untouched and in order, its music and the libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa. Sung in Italian with English surtitles, **LA BOHÈME** is a co-production of Boston Lyric Opera, Detroit Opera and Spoleto Festival USA.

BLO Music Director **David Angus** conducts the BLO Orchestra and Chorus. Stage design is by BLO Artistic Advisor **John Conklin**. Costume design is by **Jessica Jahn**. Lighting designer is **John Torres**.

Lauren Michelle (Nedda in 2019's *Pagliacci*) returns to BLO to sing the role of Mimi. **Chelsea Basler** (2019's *Fellow Travelers*, inaugural Street Stage artist in 2020) is Musetta. **Jesus Garcia** (seen in BLO's recent production of *Champion*) portrays Rodolfo. **Edward Parks** is Marcello, **Benjamin Taylor** is Schaunard, and **William Guanbo Su** is Colline. BLO Emerging Artists **Fred C. VanNess, Jr.** and **Junhan Choi** play Parpignol and Alcindoro, respectively.

PHOTO CAPTION THIS PAGE: Rodolfo (Matthew White) despairs as Mimi (Lauren Michelle) succumbs in an earlier production of Yuval Sharon's **LA BOHÈME**. PHOTO Spoleto Festival USA

This production adds a new character to the story, The Wanderer, who will be played by Boston-based performer **Marshall Hughes**. Hughes previously directed BLO collaborations with the Castle of Our Skins music group and makes his BLO stage debut here. The Wanderer offers spoken introductions for each act, guiding audiences through the reverse chronology of the story. He also appears in three scenes, putting the familiar action on hold and asking the audience to consider which direction the story could have gone. Text is drawn from original source material for the opera and its stage directions, allowing it to remain true to its artistic heritage and intentions.

"In this reimagining of LA BOHÈME Yuval brings a novel approach, focusing on the love that brought these people together and leaving us with hope," says **Bradley Vernatter, BLO Acting Stanford Calderwood General & Artistic Director**. "It's both familiar and groundbreaking. Whether it's your first time seeing the opera, or you can hum all of your favorite lines, this performance will be new for you and everyone."



Sharon (left) says the original structure of the opera makes it ripe for a rethink. "The music that begins Act I and Act IV is almost identical," he says. "Even in its normal chronology, LA BOHÈME isn't a linear narrative, it's a collection of short episodes. So reversing it becomes easier than you might expect, yet the effect is profound...suddenly a classic, archetypal opera becomes a bit of a mystery."

When audiences leave the theater, they won't leave with the heaviness of inevitability, Sharon says. "Instead, they'll leave with a notion that the pain was worth the fleeting moments of joy. We move backward, so our audience can move forward," he says.

"Although we are re-ordering the acts we haven't tinkered with the music in any way," says **BLO Music Director David Angus**, who notes the design of the Colonial stage and pit will bring the orchestra into the theater itself. "Audiences will hear the original Puccini music and get the full impact of the score as it was originally written."

BLO Artistic Advisor and set designer **John Conklin** is known for his work with opera companies throughout the world. Conklin was Associate Artistic Director at Glimmerglass Opera for 18 years and has worked extensively at Metropolitan Opera, as well as on- and off-Broadway. He has been nominated for a Tony Award, received the Robert L.B. Tobin Award for Lifetime Achievement in Theatrical Design from Theatre Development Fund, and is a recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Opera Honor.

"The costumes are 19th-century, there's a sofa for Mimi to die on, there are café chairs and tables in Momus," Conklin says, "In a way, it's a recognizable production of Bohème. But we're disturbing the narrative, fracturing it."

LA BOHÈME performances will be held Fri Sep 23 and Oct 2 at 7:30 pm; and Sun Sep 25 and Oct 4 at 3:00 pm, at the Emerson Colonial Theatre. Tickets start at \$25 and are available online at blo.org or by calling BLO Audience Services at 617-542-6772. Season subscriptions including LA BOHÈME are also available.

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MEDIA CONTACTS: For more on BLO's production, such as artist interviews, access to rehearsals, and photo or video assets, contact John Michael Kennedy jmk@jmkpr.com or 781-620-1761 or Jennifer Astin ja@jmkpr.com or 424-333-1718.