

# MADAMA BUTTERFLY

**BOSTON  
LYRIC  
OPERA**

**A NEW BLO  
PRODUCTION**

**SEP 14-24, 2023**

Emerson Colonial Theatre

MUSIC BY

**Giacomo Puccini**

LIBRETTO BY

**Luigi Illica AND**

**Giuseppe Giacosa**

CONDUCTOR

**David Angus**

DIRECTOR

**Phil Chan**

ARTISTIC ADVISOR & DRAMATURG

**Nina Yoshida Nelsen**

**BRADLEY VERNATTER**

*Stanford Calderwood  
General Director & CEO*

**DAVID ANGUS**

*Music Director*

**JOHN CONKLIN,**

**VIMBAYI KAZIBONI, &**

**NINA YOSHIDA NELSEN**

*Artistic Advisors*



## PRE-SHOW LECTURE

Listen to Professor Allison Voth speak about the history and music of *Madama Butterfly* in this 25-minute lecture.



Allison Voth is an associate professor of music at Boston University's School of Music, and principal coach at Boston University's Opera Institute.

## STUDY GUIDE

A Guide to BLO's *Madama Butterfly*. For additional reading, see pages 9-13.



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# Welcome to Boston Lyric Opera's 47<sup>TH</sup> SEASON!



On behalf of all of us at Boston Lyric Opera, I extend a hearty welcome to the beginning of our 2023/24 Season.

This season, we embark on a journey of love — exploring the idea “All I have, I give for love.” This quote comes from our closing opera of the season, *Eurydice*, a new work by Boston-born composer Matthew Aucoin, based on the famous play by Sarah Ruhl, and has become a theme that has resonated as we prepare these productions for the stage. Each story this season asks the question: what would you give for those you love?

Our *Madama Butterfly* asks this question of the heroine in a new way. Inspired by the lives of thousands of Japanese American women, from a real place and time in American history, we encounter Butterfly as she falls deeply in love before her life is upended by the sociopolitical fallout of World War II and finds herself sustained by friendship, devotion, and an enduring love for her child. While our telling is both familiar and revelatory, at the heart of this story is a multi-dimensional, fully-formed woman navigating extreme circumstances while caring for her family. She exemplifies strength, courage, and love that reaches beyond the walls of a theater and reminds us of our own humanity.

In many ways, this Season's question resonates with me personally — for the love of opera, so much is worth giving. This fall's production of *Madama Butterfly* is the culmination of nearly three years of exploration, discussion, and deep internal reflection. We gave our time and energy to broaden our perspectives and center storytelling that invites everyone to participate because of our love — love for Puccini's music, for this art form, for our shared stories, and for all of you — our community, from those in the audience to those on and off the stage.

I am humbled by, and express deep appreciation for, our exceptional artists who alongside our Board, staff, and you — our community — are expanding what opera can be, for all of us.

I look forward to seeing you all season long. Join us for our next opera, a new production of the classic tale of *Cinderella*, set in Boston and directed by our city's own Dawn M. Simmons.

You make opera possible. Thank you for supporting Boston Lyric Opera, and thank you for your participation in our arts community.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bradley Vernatter'.

Bradley Vernatter | *Stanford Calderwood* General Director & CEO

**Learn more about BLO's work in *The Butterfly Process* on page 21  
or online at [BLO.org/butterfly-process](https://blo.org/butterfly-process).**



## UPCOMING BLO EVENTS

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**OCT 13-15**

BLO at the Fort Point  
Open Studios

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**OCT 18**

OPERA NIGHT at the  
Boston Public Library

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**OCT 26**

PRIMA SPOOKY  
SOIRÉE at the Midway  
Artists Studio

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**MAR 26**

OPERA NIGHT at the  
Boston Public Library

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**APR 6**

THE WANDERER'S  
TETHERING at  
Holy Cross

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**For additional details  
and event times, visit  
[blo.org/events](https://blo.org/events)**

## MISSION, VISION, VALUES

Boston Lyric Opera's new mission, vision, and values were created with the extensive participation of the leadership team and staff of the Company and represent the first time the organization has adopted a clear set of shared values to guide the work of our team.

### Mission

**Boston Lyric Opera inspires, entertains, and connects communities through compelling opera performances, programs, and gatherings.**

### Vision

To create operatic moments that enrich everyday life.

### Values

**BOLDNESS** | We tell evocative stories through music and drama on a large scale and in unexpected settings. We celebrate the rich history of opera and promote adventurousness, which advances the art form, accesses our imaginations, and inspires new thinking.

**CONNECTION** | We nurture a vital ecosystem of relationships and exchanges that elevate the human experience and impact people. These connections are the force that strengthens us and our communities.

**COLLABORATION** | Opera is deeply interconnected storytelling, music, and design on an ambitious level that requires many people's artistry, technical skill, passion, participation, and support. We nurture creative people and partnerships that are diverse in thinking and experiences, and we provide structure and support for everyone to thrive.

**LEARNING** | We seek opportunities to learn new ideas and expand our minds, which drives progress. We create time and space to listen, engage, and grow together.

**BELONGING** | We are committed to storytelling that reflects a wide variety of perspectives and identities and invites everyone to participate. We create welcoming and accessible spaces that celebrate the uniqueness of our communities.



## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, & ACCESSIBILITY

To fulfill our mission, we must engage people of all backgrounds — meaningfully and respectfully — throughout our organization. For Boston Lyric Opera, advancing the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility is a moral priority and a necessity for our success. As adopted by the Board in the 2021/22 Season, we commit to becoming a more diverse and inclusive organization and fostering healthy, vital communities. To that end, this work underscores all that we do and is embedded in our strategic priorities.

We recognize that this work will take time, intentional actions, and accountability from our Board, employees, artists, patrons, and community. We commit to embracing individuals of all backgrounds and identities.

Opera has the power to speak the truth, broaden perspectives, and invite empathy. We acknowledge that the history of operas and those engaged in opera has not always been diverse or inclusive. We believe that we can address the necessary changes for opera to evolve and thrive.

### OUR DEIA VALUES

- We acknowledge and appreciate the inherent human rights of all individuals without discrimination.
- We believe that our work must be based on mutual respect.
- We aim to examine our actions so that we may act without bias based on the differences we encounter during our work.
- We aspire to listen to, learn from, and seek diversity among the voices that join us in our work.



For more information, scan  
the QR code or visit us at:  
**[BLO.org/deia](https://blo.org/deia)**

Top left: *Romeo & Juliet*, 2022; Nile Scott Photography

DIVERSITY EQUITY INCLUSION ACCESSIBILITY

## A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR & BOARD PRESIDENT



Dear Esteemed Guests,

On behalf of Boston Lyric Opera, it is our distinct pleasure to extend a warm welcome to our Fall Season. As long-serving board members, we continue to be inspired by the artistic excellence and daring of this company, and by the individuals who have shaped and guided us through both inspiring triumphs and challenging times.

One of those individuals is BLO's Immediate Past Board Chair, Michael Puzo. To him, we express our deepest gratitude for his unwavering leadership, especially during the unpredictability of the pandemic. Michael's guidance and dedication have been invaluable in steering us through these uncertain times.

As we look ahead, we are excited to serve as Chair and President of BLO's Board of Directors. With our decades of combined service and stewardship, we are committed to upholding the legacy of excellence that defines BLO.

We are equally thrilled to share our excitement about the remarkable productions that await us this fall. Our production of *Madama Butterfly* has been reimagined to capture the essence of this timeless music in a new American context. With Puccini's extraordinary score in place — which has some of the most emotionally moving, beautiful music — Phil Chan's production promises us a poignant journey.

This production comes on the heels of a remarkable 2022/23 Season for BLO. We take immense pride in the Company's being a co-commissioner and co-producer for the Pulitzer Prize-winning production of Rhiannon Giddens' and Michael Abels' *Omar*, which closed out BLO's most recent Season. This recognition not only honors Rhiannon and Michael's exceptional talents, but also speaks to the leadership and vision of BLO and paves the way for future productions that will undoubtedly captivate audiences far beyond our city's borders.

In closing, please accept our heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your support. Your presence at our performances and commitment to Boston Lyric Opera makes our work possible. Together, we will continue to enrich each other's lives through the beauty and power of opera.

With warm regards,

Alicia M. Cooney | Board Chair  
Boston Lyric Opera

Wayne C. Davis | Board President  
Boston Lyric Opera

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Peter J. Wender

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J.P. Barger♦

Horace H. Irvine II♦

Sherif A. Nada

*As of Sep. 1, 2023*

♦ Deceased



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- Events & Programs
- Early Access
- Free Exchanges
- and more!

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MEMBER



[BLO.ORG/MEMBERSHIP](https://blo.org/membership)

# MADAMA BUTTERFLY

Music by GIACOMO PUCCINI

Libretto by LUIGI ILLICA AND  
GIUSEPPE GIACOSA

*Sung in Italian with English surtitles*

David Angus, BLO Music Director

2023/24 Season Sponsor

Linda Cabot Black

## PERFORMANCES

THU, SEP 14, 2023 | 7:30PM

SUN, SEP 17, 2023 | 3PM

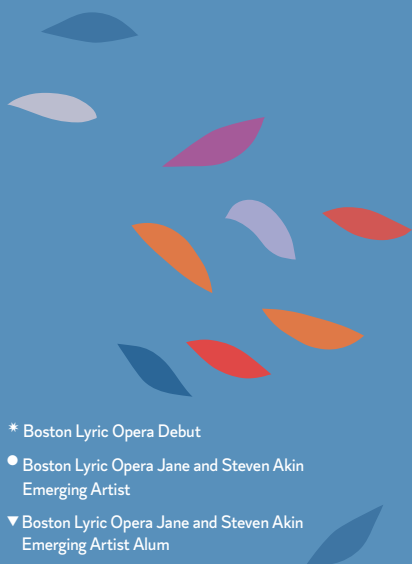
FRI, SEP 22, 2023 | 7:30PM

SUN, SEP 24, 2023 | 3PM

Running time: 2 hours and 25 minutes, plus  
one 20-minute intermission after Act 1.

## EMERSON COLONIAL THEATRE

106 Boylston Street  
Boston, MA 02116



\* Boston Lyric Opera Debut

● Boston Lyric Opera Jane and Steven Akin  
Emerging Artist

▼ Boston Lyric Opera Jane and Steven Akin  
Emerging Artist Alum

## CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor  
**DAVID ANGUS**

Stage Director  
**PHIL CHAN\***

BLO Artistic Advisor & Dramaturg  
**NINA YOSHIDA NELSEN**

Set Designer  
**YU SHIBAGAKI\***

Costume Designer  
**SARA RYUNG CLEMENT\***

Lighting Designer  
**JEANETTE OI-SUK YEW\***

Wig & Makeup Designer  
**FUJI DRESKIN\***

Choreographer  
**MICHAEL SAKAMOTO\***

Intimacy Director  
**JACKIE DAVIS**

Historical Dramaturg  
**ARTHUR DONG\***

Historical Dramaturg  
**KAREN INOUE\***

Historical Dramaturg  
**ASHLYN AIKO NELSON\***

Boston Lyric Opera Orchestra  
**ANNIE RABBAT** *Orchestra Leader*

Chorus Director  
**BRETT HODGDON\***

Rehearsal Coach/Accompanist  
**DOUGLAS SUMI**

Stage Manager  
**KRISTEN BARRETT\***

## CAST

Butterfly (Cio-Cio-San)  
**KAREN CHIA-LING HO\***

Suzuki  
**ALICE CHUNG\***

B. F. Pinkerton  
**DOMINICK CHENES\***

Sharpless  
**TROY COOK**

Goro  
**RODELL ROSEL\***

Uncle Bonzo  
**HYUNGJIN SON\***

Kate Pinkerton  
**VERA SAVAGE\***

Signor Dori (Yamadori)  
**MATTHEW ARNOLD**

Commissioner/Registrar  
**JUNHAN CHOI\***

Dolore (Butterfly's Child)  
**NEKO UMPHENOUR\***

Solo Dancer  
**CASSIE WANG**

Dancer  
**AZAMAT ASANGUL\***

## SUPERNUMERARIES

Butterfly Miura  
**KEIKO ORRALL\***

Suzuki Kochiyama  
**DONNA TSUFURA\***

Waiter  
**LOUIS JING\***

## SYNOPSIS

### PROLOGUE

*Hawaii, 1983.* Two women are in the kitchen making a cake, an annual tradition. One pulls out mementos from their past to recall their previous life.

### ACT I

*San Francisco, 1941.* B. F. Pinkerton, a young naval officer, meets his mentor Sharpless, a senior military official, at Club Shangri-La in Chinatown. In a show of gratitude for their military service, the nightclub orchestrates a nightly performance that "marries" one of the GIs to one of the club's performers. Pinkerton, the evening's chosen groom, is paired with Butterfly, a singer who is pretending to be Chinese to avoid discrimination due to her Japanese heritage. The festivities are interrupted by the grocer next door, Uncle Bonze, who reveals Butterfly's true identity. The crowd in the club disperses; Pinkerton and Butterfly find themselves alone and begin to fall in love.

### PRELUDE TO ACT II

Several months go by over the course of Pinkerton and Butterfly's affair, during which the Japanese military bombs Pearl Harbor, and thousands of Japanese Americans are taken from their homes and livelihoods to be incarcerated. Pinkerton is shipped off to war, and a pregnant Butterfly is taken to an incarceration camp.

### ACT II

*Poston, 1944.* Butterfly's son contracts tuberculosis. Desperate for medical assistance for her child, Butterfly holds out hope that Pinkerton will return soon to help him. Sharpless, now an incarceration camp official, returns to inform Butterfly that Pinkerton has been injured and is coming to meet his son. Before he can tell her the news of Pinkerton's injury, Butterfly introduces Sharpless to her sick son. Sharpless promises to summon Pinkerton immediately, and Butterfly and Suzuki decorate the barracks with paper flowers, as Butterfly waits for him through the cold desert night.

### ACT III

In a dream, Butterfly's past, present, and future come together. The following morning, Pinkerton arrives to claim his son, with his new wife, Kate, at his side. Realizing that her son's survival depends on giving him to Pinkerton and Kate, Butterfly agrees, only to find it is too late.

# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

from Phil Chan



**T**he reason our beloved classics are so durable is not only their sublime music and depths of human emotion, but also their ability to take on many different contexts to reflect the current moment. Anyone who has seen a Shakespearean play with a different setting than historical or traditional stagings (or, most operas performed in Europe) has experienced this. Reimagining the classics is a part of cultural tradition and a way to keep them alive.

*Madama Butterfly* is and will continue to be an important part of the opera ecosystem. It almost always brings large audiences, providing much needed visibility and revenue for opera companies, especially during financially trying times for the arts. Despite containing some of the most beautiful music in the operatic canon, there are aspects of *Madama Butterfly* that often alienate audiences today, leading it to be in danger of being on the cancel culture chopping block. How do we find a way forward for this work? How do we continue to present this tragedy that happens at the expense of an Asian woman, especially at a time when hate crimes against our Asian American community have gone up exponentially, taking the brunt of our fears during a global pandemic?

A big part of my creative process in ballet has been finding ways to take European classics that still speak to us and expand their potential for diverse, 21st-century audiences. My favorite creative prompt is “What else could it be?” The challenge becomes:

how can we recenter this European story about fantastical Japanese people set over a century ago, and make it into a story that centers an American experience for all of us — while keeping Puccini’s score intact?

Our production offers a congruent setting for the music. During Puccini’s life, the defining moment of contact between Japan and the West was Commodore Perry’s opening of Japan; for us, as Americans today, it is World War II. Working alongside the brilliant Nina Yoshida Nelsen, we grafted Puccini’s score onto a new setting but consistent story that re-centers an Asian American experience in the 1940s. After all, *Cio-Cio San* is one of the first fictional depictions of a Japanese American.

It is our sincere hope that our production can be a way forward for Puccini’s immortal music but also bring a lesser-known American history to the stage. I’m grateful for BLO’s incredible support, from *The Butterfly Process* conversations to the realization of this production, and the creative input of an all-Asian American creative team, with a special thank you to Arthur Dong, Karen Inouye, and Ashlyn Aiko Nelson for their historical guidance.

All of this work in reimagining ultimately is in service to you, our audience. I can’t wait for you to experience this incredible cast of artists who bring this story to life; you are in for a treat. Thank you for joining us tonight — I hope you find yourself swept into the story of a mother’s unbreakable love.

# CIO-CIO-SAN AT WAR:

## MADAMA BUTTERFLY, WORLD WAR II, AND THE JAPANESE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

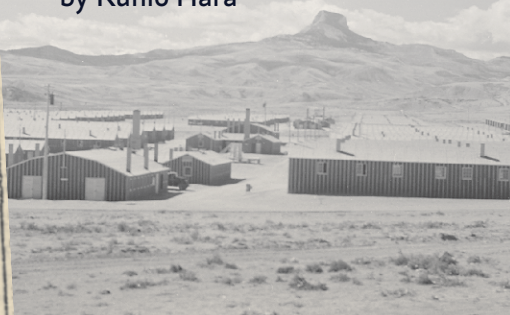
by Kunio Hara

### Brooklyn Hears Puccini's Opera Despite Protest

NEW YORK — Puccini's opera, "Madame Butterfly", the story of a Japanese girl's ill-fated romance with an American naval officer, was presented Saturday night at the Brooklyn Academy of Music—its first production in this country since Pearl Harbor.

Director Alfredo Salmaggi, who has five sons in the armed service, said he went ahead with the plans to produce the opera despite several letters of protest from relatives of service men.

"Art is international," he said, "and this opera was written long before the war."



Inset: Heart Mountain Sentinel, Dec. 2, 1944, page 8;  
Heart Mountain Relocation Center, Sep. 18, 1942.

On December 2, 1944, a newspaper from Cody, Wyoming published a small notice about a performance of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music the previous week. Oddly, the unsigned article does not contain any description of the performance itself. Instead, it dwells on the decision of the company's director, Alfredo Salmaggi, to mount the opera, which had not been performed in New York City since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The article reports that Salmaggi had received "several letters of protests from relatives of service men" but also reminds that he too had "five sons in the armed services." The piece concludes with Salmaggi's justifying claims that "art is international" and that "this opera was written long before the war." The newspaper that printed this intriguing article was the *Heart Mountain Sentinel*, a publication produced by the inmates of the Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming—one of ten incarceration camps constructed in the remote interior

of the continental United States that collectively housed over 120,000 people of Japanese descent who were forcibly removed from their homes on the West Coast during World War II.

At the heart of controversy was the sudden and powerful surge of anti-Japanese sentiment that emerged at the outbreak of the Pacific War, which spilled over to Japanese Americans and, as it turned out, cultural artifacts like *Madama Butterfly*. However, considering that the opera was produced by a team of Italian artists (Giacomo Puccini, Luigi Illica, and Giuseppe Giacosa) and based on a play and a short story by American authors (David Belasco and John Luther Long), the so-called "ban" on *Madama Butterfly* does seem ironic. In fact, when the war between the US and Japan broke out, music critics were quick to reassure the audiences that *Madama Butterfly* would remain on stage. On December 14, barely a week after the attack on Pearl Harbor, a writer for *The New York Times* predicted that the opera would likely be performed by the Metropolitan



Almost 120 years after the premiere of *Madama Butterfly*, and more than 80 years after the outbreak of the Pacific War, we are once again at a historic moment where Asian American representation on the operatic stage is being interrogated and renegotiated to respond to the events unfolding in real life.

Opera later that season. The author of the column “Mephisto’s Musings” in the December 25 issue of *Musical America* openly scoffed at the idea that people might have problems with the opera. Despite their optimistic predictions, the managements of the Met and other major opera companies throughout the nation quietly retracted the opera from their repertoires.

This ban on *Madama Butterfly* did not, of course, prevent people from listening to or performing excerpts from the opera outside of the opera house in private and public settings. Taking an accurate account of such “rogue” performances of *Madama Butterfly* during the war is a difficult challenge. However, scouring through newspapers such as the *Heart Mountain Sentinel* reveals that, surprisingly, some of the places *Madama Butterfly* continued to be heard and performed were the Japanese American incarceration camps. These performances took various forms, including record concerts held at libraries, a marionette play for a Christmas program, and recitals both in and out of the camps. For instance, the March 13, 1943, issue of *The Minidoka Irrigator* from Hunt, Idaho reports that the Japanese American students from Hunt High School presented “a well-rounded program of semi-classical and popular numbers” to the students at Burly High School outside the camp. The program included instrumental showpieces, a wide variety of songs such as Charles Gounod’s “Ave Maria” (after J.S. Bach), Jerome Kern’s “Old Man River,” and Glenn Miller’s “Juke Box Saturday Night,” baton twirling, and a lively rendition of school cheers by the “yell team.” It also included a rendition of “One Fine Day” (“Un bel dì”) from *Madama Butterfly* by a student named Susie Takimoto.

To us today, the young Japanese American singer’s selection of “Un bel dì” under these extraordinary circumstances may seem like an unexpected one. But when we consider what the aria represents within the narrative of *Madama Butterfly*, her choice can be seen as an astute and moving political gesture. In the opera, the aria emerges early in Act II when Cio-Cio-San attempts to convince Suzuki that Pinkerton will return to Nagasaki. Cio-Cio-San encourages Suzuki—and by extension us the audience members—to visualize the approach of a foreign ship from across the sea that carries her American husband. Pinkerton’s return, Cio-Cio-San believes, will not only rescue her from abject poverty and from her extreme social isolation but also reaffirm the legitimacy of her marriage, something others around her do not take seriously. Is it a stretch of imagination to see a parallel, in this instance, between Cio-Cio-San’s longing to be recognized as Pinkerton’s American wife and the incarcerated Japanese American students’ desire to regain their liberty?

Musically speaking, “Un bel dì” stands out within the score of *Madama Butterfly* in that it has almost no allusion to Japanese music. This becomes obvious when comparing it to Cio-Cio-San’s second Act II aria, “Che tua madre” which stitches together at least three Japanese melodies—“Suiryō-Bushi,” “Jizuki-Uta,” and “Kappore Hōnen”—which Puccini gathered from printed collections of Japanese music. Composed in his signature late-Romantic style, “Un bel dì” has more in common with arias by heroines from Puccini’s earlier works such as Manon’s “In quelle trine morbide” and Mimi’s “Sì, mi chiamano Mimi,” which closely follow the shifting psychological states of characters. Puccini captures




Cio-Cio-San's state of mind at the opening of "Un bel di" through her gently descending melody supported by the soft sustaining tones of the thinned-out orchestra as she imagines the arrival of Pinkerton's ship. The mood changes suddenly in the middle portion of the aria as Cio-Cio-San describes in vivid details how she imagines Pinkerton arriving at their house and explains the range of emotions she would experience. To illustrate this, Puccini projects a variety of moods in rapid succession ranging from suspense to nostalgic reflection, from playfulness to painful yearning. Puccini caps off the aria with Cio-Cio-San's assertion that "all of this will happen" ("tutto questo avverrà") as the orchestra surges to reiterate the opening melody in full volume. When confronted with this dramatic gesture, it is hard not to be moved by Cio-Cio-San's conviction and the depth of her feelings. We are so profoundly moved because we see in this aria the fundamental injustice and absurdity of the situation in which Cio-Cio-San finds herself and because we recognize Cio-Cio-San's humanity in her struggle to overcome her fate.

Indeed, when *Madama Butterfly* was revived at the Met in early 1946, New York critics reflected on the recent prohibition on the opera and tellingly cited the possibility of humanizing a Japanese protagonist as one reason for it. Puccini's fictional opera was also used to make sense of the real world in other ways. One notable document is the dispatch from the war front in Allied-occupied Italy published in the November 5, 1944 issue of the *New York Times* by Harold Taubman who witnessed the performance of *Madama Butterfly* in Naples. Throughout the article, he reflects on the ridiculousness of the idea that *Madama Butterfly* contained some nefarious Japanese propaganda and gleefully welcomes the way Pinkerton treats Japanese characters with disdain and contempt. At the same time, he also comments on the courageous acts of Japanese American soldiers of the Fifth Army in Italy, comparing them to Cio-Cio-San's son Dolore. This was mostly likely the legendary 442nd Infantry Regiment made up of Japanese American soldiers, many of whom enlisted to serve the nation while in camps. Taubman concludes his observation thus: "Let our consul Sharpless but

get Sorrow [Dolore] into the United States and away from Japanese indoctrination and he might become a useful human being."

Almost 120 years after the premiere of *Madama Butterfly*, and more than 80 years after the outbreak of the Pacific War, we are once again at a historic moment where Asian American representation on the operatic stage is being interrogated and renegotiated to respond to the events unfolding in real life. *Madama Butterfly* emerged out of a particular historic and cultural context which conceived of Japanese people and their culture in problematic ways that in turn have negatively influenced how Asian people are seen and treated by others. The stream of new productions and works inspired by *Madama Butterfly* by Asian and Asian American artists that has emerged since the pronounced rise of hate crimes against people of Asian descent aims to tackle this very issue. These productions challenge the overtly racist expressions baked into the texts of the opera as well as problematic theatrical practice (exaggerated and eccentric costumes, makeup, and gestures) that have become conventionalized in performance. One line of argument against these recent efforts posits that we the audience should be able to understand *Madama Butterfly* as a fantasy and not to confuse it with reality. In other words, we can appreciate *Madama Butterfly* as it has always existed and still be supportive of Asian American people's aspirations for safety, justice, and equality. This may be the case for some viewers, but history suggests that many artists, audience members, and critics—like the ones cited above—have repeatedly sought to merge the fantasy of *Madama Butterfly* with reality. Opera, being a performative art, necessitates repeated iterations of existing works in the present moment that opens the possibility for us to seek new and different meanings. In fact, I believe that the reason why we engage with the arts in general is not necessarily to recede into the world of fantasy but rather to make sense of the world, to understand the time and space we occupy here and now. This was how people treated Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* in the United States during World War II. This is certainly one meaningful way we can engage with *Madama Butterfly* today.



Alice Chung (Suzuki) and  
Karen Chia-Ling Ho (Cio-Cio-San)  
rehearse BLO's *Madama Butterfly*.

## RE-ORIENTING MADAMA BUTTERFLY: FROM THE "WHITE GAZE" TO INCLUSIVE OPERA

by Ashlyn Aiko Sanders, Ph.D.

KATHY WITTMAN | BALL SQUARE FILMS

About twenty years ago, I attended a production of *Madama Butterfly* at San Francisco Opera. Even now, I recall the state of cognitive dissonance I experienced as an audience member. I wanted to immerse myself in the voices of the opera singers and in the visually stunning set design, but couldn't shake my discomfort with the representation of the Japanese characters. As one of the only Asian audience members, I felt self-conscious and complicit with the racial stereotyping I witnessed.

*Madama Butterfly* is the sixth most performed opera in the world and has occupied a position of privilege within the operatic canon for more than a century. At the same time, the opera portrays Asian women as submissive caricatures, and opera companies often employ historically inaccurate depictions of Japanese culture and dress in *Madama Butterfly* productions.

The continued prominence and commercial success of *Madama Butterfly* underscores the pervasiveness of the "white gaze" throughout the opera industry. Novelist Toni Morrison popularized the term "white gaze," which refers to the assumption that the default perspective of an audience is white, and the idea that others' lives have "no meaning and no depth" beyond the perceptions of white observers. Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* exemplifies the white gaze: the opera is a Western fantasy of Asian exoticism, composed for white audiences.

The performing arts currently face a collective reckoning with the "white gaze." Many opera companies globally are now reimagining opera for a more diverse audience, both because of a growing acknowledgment of how the canonical repertoire perpetuates racial

stereotyping and typecasting, and because adapting to an increasingly diverse world is imperative for sustaining the commercial viability of the opera industry.

Yet reimagining opera in this context is no small feat, especially because opera audiences and the opera industry remain overwhelmingly white, and thus perpetuate the "white gaze." Data from the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts by the National Endowment for the Arts indicate that more than three-quarters of opera audiences are white. OPERA America recently reported that more than 80% of opera company boards and staff are white, and a recent opera industry report from Indiana University found that the vast majority of voice faculty and students at universities and conservatories are white. Further, racially and ethnically diverse opera singers face fewer opportunities in the absence of race-based typecasting into traditional repertoire roles. For example, Nina Yoshida Nelsen and Nicholas Phan of the Asian Opera Alliance recently released data showing that the representation of Asian opera singers is 26% lower among opera companies if they do not include casting data from *Madama Butterfly* productions.

Decentering the "white gaze" to reach more diverse audiences requires a concerted effort to make the opera industry more inclusive at all levels. Voice programs within universities and conservatories are largely responsible for the demographic composition of the opera pipeline, so these programs must make an effort to recruit, admit, and retain diverse individuals. Part of this strategy requires diversifying staff and faculty within these institutions. Also essential is recruiting, hiring, and retaining racially and ethnically diverse individuals into opera companies, and especially into

leadership positions as artistic directors and board members. Research shows that organizations with greater racial diversity — especially among individuals who hold decision-making authority — are more likely to demonstrate outcomes that benefit historically underrepresented groups. Greater diversity in opera company leadership can facilitate innovation in how companies recruit, cast, and compensate diverse talent, as well as how they select and produce repertoire. Collectively, these efforts have the potential to shift the demographic composition of opera audiences, as diverse individuals are increasingly able to identify with opera productions and casts.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of making opera more inclusive lies in reimagining the opera itself. The solutions are not straightforward, as the case of *Madama Butterfly* illustrates. Eliminating the work from the canon entirely is impractical for opera companies today that rely on the stable ticket revenues that canonical productions generate, and also would reduce the representation of Asian singers in opera casts — at least until the canon includes operas with a greater diversity of roles and companies hire more equitably. Several opera companies are now critically examining how to preserve the beauty of the opera while eliminating its harmful stereotypes and tropes.

Boston Lyric Opera's commitment to unraveling the challenges, systemic biases, and racist practices present within the history of producing *Madama Butterfly* is known as *The Butterfly Process*. Over the last few years, BLO has worked with members of the opera community, nonprofit organizations, community leaders, and scholars to produce a version of *Madama Butterfly* that attempts to strip away the "white gaze" by centering the perspective of the Asian protagonist. In doing so, the audience will no longer experience Cio-Cio-San (*Butterfly*) as a reductive orientalist fantasy, but rather as an individual who makes a singular demand of the audience: to acknowledge the range of her emotions and experiences as evidence of her shared humanity.

BLO's 2023 production of *Madama Butterfly* marks the culmination of an incredible revision effort that spanned reconsideration of the libretto, casting, and set design. Phil Chan, Nina Yoshida Nelsen, and many others have reimagined the setting and storyline for *Madama Butterfly*, situating the opera in the US in the 1940s and presenting it from the perspective

of a young Japanese-American woman experiencing wartime incarceration. I have been honored to participate in the process of developing this new production as a historical dramaturg alongside Karen Inouye, a professor of History and American Studies at Indiana University-Bloomington and one of the nation's foremost experts on Japanese-American incarceration during WWII. Nina Yoshida Nelsen, Karen Inouye, and I are from Japanese-American families whom the US government incarcerated, and we have aimed to honor our families' experiences by conveying an historically accurate depiction of life in those concentration camps.

As part of the consultative process, Karen Inouye and I worked with set designer Yu Shibagaki, who based her design in part on photographer Dorothea Lange's images of Japanese-American concentration camps. Lange's photography, commissioned by the War Relocation Authority, also exemplifies the white gaze. Though Lange sympathized with her Japanese-American photography subjects, her images capture sanitized versions of life in concentration camps; in fact, the War Relocation Authority commanded Lange not to photograph any of the armed guards or barbed wire fences surrounding the camps. Because her work constitutes one of the few photographic records of wartime incarceration, the omission of armed guards and barbed wire from Lange's photos constitutes an erasure of the lived experiences of Japanese-American incarcerated. Our involvement in developing this production allowed us to help co-design a set that now accurately reflects—and forces the audience to contend with — the realities of Japanese-American incarceration. My experience with the set design process highlights how authentic collaboration in re-shaping an opera in the canon can make opera more inclusive: by making visible the experiences of those whom *Madama Butterfly* has alienated historically.

Boston Lyric Opera's approach to *Madama Butterfly* for this production has metamorphosed my relationship with the opera. I am thrilled to watch a production that centers the perspectives and lived experiences of more diverse individuals and considers my gaze and the gaze of my family and community.

I invite you to consider BLO's production of *Madama Butterfly* as a prototype for reimagining how canonical operas can adapt to become more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. I truly hope that the opera captures your attention and challenges your expectations.



## Two doors down from the Emerson Colonial Theatre

# Madama Butterfly

## EXHIBIT SPACE

Curated in partnership with historian and filmmaker Arthur Dong, this exhibit, ***History Comes to Life in Madama Butterfly*** will explore BLO's new production of Puccini's opera through the lens of its inspirations, from San Francisco's storied nightclub Forbidden City to the mass incarceration of thousands of American citizens following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The culmination of *The Butterfly Process*, a 3-year exploration centering authentic storytelling with new approaches to canonical operas, BLO's *Butterfly* finds its inspiration from historical places and events of that era.

Hosted by ArtsEmerson, this exhibit features a combination of film and visual displays, aiming to complement both the experience of those attending performances and those who are interested in learning more about BLO's work and partnerships surrounding this production.

At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, about 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry lived on the US mainland, mostly along the Pacific Coast. About two-thirds were full citizens, born and raised in the United States. Following the attack, a wave of anti-Japanese suspicion and fear led the Roosevelt administration to adopt a drastic policy toward these residents. Virtually all Japanese Americans were forced to leave their homes, and permanently relinquish their property before remaining incarcerated for most of the war.



Our setting for *Madama Butterfly* is inspired by Forbidden City, a nightclub and cabaret in San Francisco. Although Forbidden City was not the first Chinese American nightclub, it was the most famous nightlife venue to feature Asian American singers, dancers, chorus lines, magicians, burlesque, and musicians, and was entirely managed and staffed by Asian Americans.

Clockwise from top right: images from the *Butterfly Creative Team*; Dorothy Toy & Paul Wing (1953), *Forbidden City Postcard* (1940s), and *Forbidden City Chorus* (1940s). Courtesy of Arthur Dong

# The Flower Art of Gaman

by Douglas Sumi,   
Butterfly Rehearsal Coach

From Zen Buddhism the Japanese word *gaman* refers to the ability to endure the unbearable with dignity. Enclosed by barbed-wire fences and watchtowers, having been stripped of all resources, the incarcerated Japanese Americans were ingeniously resourceful. The Army Corps of Engineers hastily built the concentration camps, leaving lots of scraps within reach. The incarcerated used anything they could find to make necessities, creating art to pass the time. The Japanese women in my family could make virtually anything from limited resources. They epitomized the “waste not, want not” proverb. I recall paper from various sources being re-purposed to wrap church rummage sale items, or to be transformed into any number of decorative arts like paper flowers. Using patterns from magazines, Japanese American women would transform the paper into flowers, before stitching them onto muslin balls that were filled with other discarded scraps and materials. Utilizing the furnace, they would transform butter knives into scissors, chisels, and other tools. Waste from the kitchen, such as tin cans, vegetable sacks, jars, etc., would be transformed into something lovely.

Artificial flowers made living in the barracks more hospitable, and were frequently created for various occasions, such as festivals and funerals. A man named James Hatsuaki Wakasa was walking his dog near the barbed-wire fence when he was murdered by a camp guard. Honoring his death was forbidden by the authorities, though Japanese Americans ignored the warning, erected a monument, and held a funeral in his honor. Women from every camp block made 30 elaborate paper flower wreaths in his honor.

In the opera, one of the only happy moments for Butterfly and Suzuki is the famous Flower Duet, where their deep friendship is joyfully displayed as they decorate the home in anticipation of Pinkerton’s heralded arrival. In this production, the important occasion employs the historic decoration of paper flowers. This thoughtful dramaturgical



NATIONAL ARCHIVES & RECORDS ADMINISTRATION (TOM PARKER PHOTOGRAPHER)



Japanese women in a decorative arts class to make artificial flowers from tissue paper and paste at the Jerome War Relocation Center in southeastern Arkansas, March, 1943.

choice subtly connects me with my family’s camp experience in a meaningful way. Author of *The Art of Gaman*, Delphine Hirasuna, sums up the profoundly poignant response to the torment: “When the powers that be take everything away from you, the only thing left is your own creative expression, what you have in your mind. And so art became in many ways essential to mental survival in the camps.”



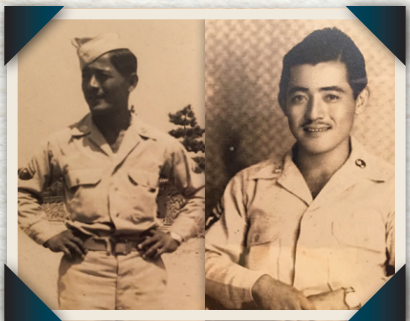
## A NOTE FROM BLO ARTISTIC ADVISOR NINA YOSHIDA NELSEN

As an opera singer, I've thought of the stories I've told on stage as "human" stories about life's loves, losses, and redemptions. I've never really questioned why the stories we present over and over are about people from long ago and far away — fairy tales. About people whose lives are so different from ours that we sometimes have to work to identify with them. This production of *Madama Butterfly* is not a fantasy made by outsiders to Japanese culture and history. Instead, it echos my own Japanese American family's history of incarceration during WWII.

Being part of reframing this classic tragedy is not only my opportunity, but as the eldest living Yoshida in my direct line, it has now become my responsibility to honor those who have come before me. I celebrate my great-grandmother, who came to the United States from Japan as a "picture bride." I celebrate my great-grandfather, who worked on the West coast

to help build the railroad. I celebrate the resilience of my grandparents, who came out of the incarceration camp in Poston, Arizona as newlyweds with nothing to their names, only the love in their hearts. They built a life filled with family, joy, compassion and rich experiences, despite what happened to them during the war. I celebrate my father, who was the first in his family to earn a college degree. He was always finding ways to give back to his community.

I also share the faces of my relatives as a gift to my sons, who come after me. In Japanese American culture we often say "never again" in reference to incarceration. This means not only remembering, but continuing to tell our history. Tragedies don't only happen in fairy tales. They also happen to actual people — people like you, people like me. They don't only happen long ago and far away, but also in the lived experiences of us and our ancestors.



Uncle Ginyei Matsudo, US Army Occupied Japan, Lahaina, Maui, HI in the 1940s. Contributor: Keiko Orrall, Butterfly Miura



Japanese Americans in the 442nd Regiment of the US Army WWII Lahaina, Maui, HI, 1943. Contributor: Keiko Orrall, Butterfly Miura



Uncle Minoru Nakamura with friends in the 442nd Regiment of the US Army, Lahaina, Maui, HI in the 1940s. Contributor: Keiko Orrall, Butterfly Miura



Baby Ronald with parents Masako & Mitsuo Yoshida, 1948 Contributor: Nina Yoshida Nelsen, Artistic Advisor





Grandma Sakamoto and friends in Manzanar  
Contributor: Michael Sakamoto, Choreographer



Sakamoto Wedding, Manzanar Camp, CA, 1943  
Contributor: Michael Sakamoto, Choreographer



Mitsuo Yoshida & family incarcerated in Poston, AZ  
Contributor: Nina Yoshida Nelsen, Artistic Advisor



Sakamoto Silver Anniversary, Los Angeles, CA, 1968  
Contributor: Michael Sakamoto, Choreographer



Ron, Betty, Mitsuo, Masako & Frances Yoshida, 1970  
Contributor: Nina Yoshida Nelsen, Artistic Advisor



Mitsuye & Joey Kurose, Rohwer Camp, AR, Feb. 10, 1945  
Contributor: Michael Sakamoto, Choreographer



Baby Nina with grandparents Masako & Mitsuo Yoshida, 1980  
Contributor: Nina Yoshida Nelsen, Artistic Advisor

## MEET THE ARTISTS

### CREATIVE TEAM



#### DAVID ANGUS | Conductor

Now in his fourteenth year as Boston Lyric Opera's music director, David Angus recently served as music director and conductor for the critically acclaimed online productions of *desert in* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*, as well as BLO's backwards *La Bohème* and Anne Bogart's striking production of *Bluebeard's Castle*. In addition to his work with BLO, he just conducted a new *Sweeney Todd* at the Royal Opera in Stockholm, *The Marriage of Figaro* in Prague, and several recordings of new American works with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Prior to his time at BLO, Angus was music director of The Glimmerglass Festival and Chief Conductor of the Symphony Orchestra of Flanders. He has led orchestras and choirs throughout Europe, particularly in Scandinavia, including the Lahti Symphony Orchestra and several Danish orchestras. Born in England, he has conducted most of the major orchestras in Great Britain, including the London Philharmonic, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra, most of the BBC orchestras, the London Mozart Players, and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. He recently debuted with the Toscanini Orchestra in Parma and the Porto Symphony Orchestra in Portugal. He returned to Wexford Festival Opera, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the LPO, and the Huddersfield Choral Society, as well as to his former orchestra in Belgium. Angus was a boy chorister at King's College under Sir David Willcocks and read music at Surrey University. He was a conducting fellow at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, where he won several prizes for opera conducting.



#### PHIL CHAN | Stage Director

Phil Chan is a choreographer, director, advocate, and the President of the Gold Standard Arts Foundation. He is a graduate of Carleton College and an alumnus of The Ailey School. He has held fellowships with NYU, Manhattan School of Music, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and is currently a fellow at Harvard University, Drexel University, Dance/USA, and the Institut

national d'histoire de l'art (INHA) in Paris. As a writer, he served as the Executive Editor for FLATT Magazine, contributed to Dance Europe Magazine and the Huffington Post, and currently serves on the advisory board of Dance Magazine. He served multiple years on the National Endowment for the Arts dance panel and the Jadin Wong Fellowship panel presented by the Asian American Arts Alliance. He was just named a Next 50 Arts Leader by the Kennedy Center.



#### NINA YOSHIDA NELSEN |

*BLO Artistic Advisor & Dramaturg*

Nina Yoshida Nelsen, mezzo soprano, is an avid advocate for equity in the arts. She is perhaps best known for her countless performances of Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly* with opera companies throughout North America and Europe. Also well known for her work in contemporary opera, Ms. Yoshida Nelsen has sung in seven world premieres as well as their subsequent productions. Equally at home on the concert stage, Ms. Yoshida Nelsen has performed in world-class halls, including Carnegie Hall, Avery Fisher Hall, and Royal Albert Hall. Ms. Yoshida Nelsen is an Artistic Advisor for Boston Lyric Opera and serves as president of the Asian Opera Alliance, an organization of which she is a co-founder.



#### YU SHIBAGAKI | Set Designer

Yu Shibagaki (she/her) is a NYC-based set designer, originally from Nagoya, Japan. Recent designs include *Exotic Deadly*; *Or the MSG Play* (The Old Globe); *The Sound Inside* (Everyman Theatre) *Villette* (Lookingglass Theatre Company); *1919* (Steppenwolf for Young Adults); *Heroes of the Fourth Turning* (Studio Theatre); *Dishwasher Dreams* (Hartford Stage); *Her Honor Jane Byrne* (Lookingglass Theatre Company); *School Girls*; *Or, the African Mean Girls Play* (Goodman Theatre); *I, Banquo* and *I, Cinna* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); and more. Upcoming designs include *Lucy & Charlie's Honeymoon* (Lookingglass Theatre Company); *Madama Butterfly* (Boston Lyric Opera); *Dishwasher Dreams* (The Old Globe); and more.




**SARA RYUNG CLEMENT |**
*Costume Designer*

Sara Ryung Clement's off-Broadway credits include: *Golden Shield*, *Manhattan Theatre Club*; *Some-*

*body's Daughter*, Second Stage Uptown; *Fruiting Bodies*, Ma-Yi Theater Company. Regional: Guthrie Theater, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Alley Theatre, Center Theatre Group, South Coast Repertory, Denver Center, Geffen Playhouse, Asolo Repertory, Folger Theatre, Pasadena Playhouse, Seattle Rep, and others. Her upcoming projects include the premiere of Larissa FastHorse's *Fake it Until You Make It* (scenic) and *Madama Butterfly* at Boston Lyric Opera. She is a member of the set design faculty at UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television. She received her MFA from the Yale School of Drama and her BA from Princeton University.


**JEANETTE OI-SUK YEW |**
*Lighting Designer*

Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew is an award-winning lighting designer for theatre, dance, opera, musicals, music

performances, installation, immersive experiences, and digital productions. Her designs have been seen across US cities and internationally. As a designer, she aims to create a visual environment that is organically integrated into the landscape and language of the production. Recent operas: *Blue*, Detroit Opera; *Sweetland*, The Industry (2020 Design Achievement Award); *SWELL* (digital opera); Hannah Lash's *Desire*, Miller Theatre; Kamala Sankaram's *Thumbprint*, LA Opera; Peter Brook's *La Tragédie de Carmen* and Sheila Silver's *The Wooden Sword*; Peter Winkler's *Fox Fables* with Rhoda Levine; and *Don Giovanni*, *Die Fledermaus*, and *L'incoronazione di Poppea* with Isabel Milenski. Other: *Kimberly Akimbo* (Best Musical Tony Award), *The Thanksgiving Play*, *cullud wattah* (Drama Desk & AUDELCO nomination), *Shadow/Land*, *Gloria: A Life*, *KPOP!* (Off Broadway) (2017 Henry Hewes Award, LIT Design Award, Lortel and Drama Desk Nominations), *A.R.T.'s WILD: A Musical Becoming* and *Macbeth In Stride*, Shakespeare Theatre Company's *King Lear*, and Theaterworks' *Walden* (Connecticut Critics Circle Awards in Best Lighting Design). She is an Associate Arts

Professor and Head of Lighting Design at NYU's Tisch Drama. She is also a NEA/TCG Career Development Program recipient.


**FUJI DRESKIN |**
*Wig & Makeup Designer*

Fuji Dreskin is an illustrator, filmmaker, and hip hop artist based in her hometown of Denver, Colorado.

She was a producer, illustrator, and wardrobe assistant for the independent short film *Dirty Rotten Tofu and the Gohan Girls* by June Inuzuka. This dynamic spaghetti western stars three AAPI women in lead action roles. Dreskin was also the hair and makeup artist for the music video *One Fine Day*, an expression of Japanese American opera singer Margaret Ozaki Graves's personal experiences with *Madama Butterfly*. Films she has worked on have been shown at festivals nationally, including The DC Asian Pacific American Film Festival, The Colorado Dragon Boat Film Festival, and The L.A. Independent Shorts Awards. Dreskin's passion projects usually revolve around writing and producing her original music, in addition to collaborating with other artists to create music videos. Her most recent release is a single titled "Fire to the Cages," where themes of animal liberation and advocacy are centered. Her upcoming music video for "Fire to the Cages" was filmed at the epic Wild Animal Sanctuary in Colorado.


**MICHAEL SAKAMOTO |**
*Choreographer*

Michael Sakamoto is an artist, educator, curator, and scholar active in dance, theatre, photography, media, and culture. He is most known as a butoh-based

dance theater maker whose works have been presented in 15 countries throughout Asia, Europe, and North America at such venues as Vancouver International Dance Festival, REDCAT, TACTFest Osaka, Göteborg Art Sounds, Dance Center of Columbia College-Chicago, and many others. Recent touring works include *Soil* (with artists from Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam), *Flash* (with hip-hop legend Rennie Harris), and *blind spot* (with digital musician Christopher Jette). Sakamoto's current projects include *Garden of the Wilis* (with former American Ballet Theatre,

## MEET THE ARTISTS

Broadway, and film/TV performer George de la Peña, star of the Hollywood biopic *Nijinsky*), and a new autobiographical solo exploring Asian American masculinities. Michael's essays have appeared in numerous journals and book anthologies across disciplines, and his book *An Empty Room: Imagining Butoh and the Social Body in Crisis*, was published by Wesleyan University Press in 2022 and nominated for the 2023 de la Torre Bueno First Book Award. He serves as Performing Arts Curator and Asian and Asian American Arts and Culture Program Director at the University of Massachusetts Fine Arts Center.



### **JACKIE DAVIS |**

#### *Intimacy Director*

Jackie Davis is an actor, director, choreographer, and intimacy director/advocate working in theater, film, and television. Recent intimacy direction credits include: *The Inheritance, Parts 1 and 2*, Trinity Repertory Company; *A Silhouette of a Silhouette*, The Wilbury Theatre Group; *References to Salvador Dalí Make Me Hot*, Brown/Trinity MFA; and *Incels and Other Myths*, Boston Playwrights' Theatre. Recent acting credits include: Shirley Chisolm, *The Inferior Sex*; Margaret, *The Inheritance, Part 2*; and Jasmine, *Fairview*, Trinity Repertory Company. Recent directing credits include: *AntigonX*, The Wilbury Theatre Group; and *Race*, Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater. Davis can be seen as abolitionist Susan Robbins in the Columbia Pictures film *Little Women*.



### **ARTHUR DONG |**

#### *Historical Dramaturg*

Arthur Dong is an Oscar®- and Emmy-nominated, and Peabody and triple Sundance Award-winning filmmaker, author, and curator whose work centers Asian American and LGBTQ stories. Dong's films often explore personal stories of survival and resistance set against backdrops of social and cultural oppressions. His films investigating anti-gay prejudice include *Family Fundamentals*, *Licensed to Kill*, and *Coming Out Under Fire*. Dong's films about Chinese Americans include *Hollywood Chinese*; *Forbidden City, U.S.A.*; and three earlier short films: *Sewing Woman*, *Lotus*,

and *Living Music for Golden Mountains*. His collection "Stories from Chinese America" included the newly scored and restored *The Curse of Quon Gwon* (1917), the earliest known Chinese American feature film, which Dong helped rescue. His latest film, *The Killing Fields of Dr. Hoing S. Ngor*, profiles a Cambodian genocide survivor who became the first Asian male to win an Oscar® for Best Supporting Actor. Dong's first published book, *Forbidden City, USA: Chinatown Nightclubs, 1936-1970* won the American Book Award, the IPPY Award, and the Art Deco Historic Preservation Award. His latest book, *Hollywood Chinese: The Chinese in American Feature Films* is a chronicle of images based on over 2,000 pieces of movie memorabilia the author collected since childhood. The book won the Asian/Pacific American Literature Award and has been selected a "Critic's Choice" by the *Los Angeles Times* and one of "13 Smart Must-Read Books on Race and Hate" by *The Advocate*. Dong is currently developing *Grandview Film: Cinematic Crossings* (working title) with Joseph Sunn Jue, his third in a trilogy of books that focus on the visual history and little-known stories of Chinese American artists.



### **DR. KAREN INOUE |**

#### *Historical Dramaturg*

Dr. Inouye's research addresses the role of historical memory in post-WWII Asian American and Asian Canadian life. Her most recent book, *The Long Afterlife of Nikkei Wartime Incarceration* (Stanford University Press, 2016), explores the political, educational, and legislative activism that Japanese Americans undertook in the post-War years as a response to wartime incarceration.



### **DR. ASHLYN AIKO NELSON |**

#### *Historical Dramaturg*

Dr. Ashlyn Aiko Nelson is an economist who studies how housing markets and financial institutions and policies influence the education market. Her research examines the causes and consequences of inequality in the overlapping housing and public education sectors. Nelson's work, funded with support from the MacArthur Foundation and the National Science Foundation, has been published

in outlets including the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *Review of Economics and Statistics*, *Review of Financial Studies*, *Economics Letters*, *Education Finance and Policy*, and *Public Administration Review*. Nelson joined the faculty of Indiana University's O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs in 2009. She also holds courtesy appointments in Economics and in Education Leadership and Policy Studies. Prior to her current appointment, Nelson completed a postdoctoral fellowship with the Center for Education Policy Analysis at Stanford University. In addition to her academic background, Nelson formerly served as Assistant Vice President of Analysis and Information Management at Bank of America, served as the fair lending officer at IndyMac Bank, and earned her teaching credential while teaching eighth and eleventh grade English in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

## CAST



**MATTHEW ARNOLD** |  
*Signor Dori (Yamadori)*

2023 Grammy-nominated tenor Matthew Arnold is a two-time finalist of the Houston Grand Opera Eleanor McCollum Competition. Mr. Arnold has spent the last ten years working in the world of professional opera. Recent awards include third place in the Charlotte Opera Guild Competition, the Encouragement Award at the 2015-2017 Heafner/Williams Competition, the Encouragement Award from Chautauqua Opera (2015), and the Verdi Award from the Orpheus National Vocal Competition (2014). Mr. Arnold has sung throughout the United States and Europe with opera companies including the Castleton Festival, A.J. Fletcher Opera Institute, Piedmont Opera, Opera Roanoke, North Carolina Opera, and Chautauqua Opera. Recent role performances include The Ring Announcer, *Champion*, Boston Lyric Opera; Policeman/Reporter, *X: The Life and Times of Malcom X*; Bacchus, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Miami Music Festival and the A.J. Fletcher Opera Institute; Don José, *Carmen*; and Siegmund and Florestan in scenes from *Die Walküre* and *Fidelio*, respectively. He also sang Prince Yamadori, *Madama Butterfly*, Castleton Festival under the baton of the late Maestro Lorin Maazel.



**AZAMAT ASANGUL** | *Dancer*

Aazamat Asangul was born in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic. He started his studies at age 10. In 2007, Asangul was awarded a Presidential

Scholar "Personnel 21st Century" for "Creative Achievement in the Performing Skills." Later, he was invited by Altynai Asylmuratova to study in Saint Petersburg and graduated from the Vaganova Ballet Academy in 2010. He then joined Moscow City Ballet under the direction of artistic director Victor Smirnov. In 2012, Asangul was selected by Julia Moon to join Universal Ballet in South Korea. He also continued to dance with the Kyrgyz National Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre. In 2013, Asangul was invited to join the Russian National Ballet by Artistic Director Sergey Radchenko. He has toured with the Moscow City Ballet in the United Kingdom, Ireland, China, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Taiwan, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Cyprus, and Russia, and with the Russian National Ballet in the USA. In 2014, Asangul joined Island Moving Co. in Newport, Rhode Island to focus on his contemporary style. Asangul has appeared as a guest artist with Kyrgyz National Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre, Russian National Ballet, Charleston City Ballet, and Ballet Idaho. Asangul joined Festival Ballet Providence in 2017.



**DOMINICK CHENES** |  
*B. F. Pinkerton*

Lyrico-spinto tenor Dominick Chenes' most recent operatic credits include Pinkerton, *Madama Butterfly* Seattle Opera and in Hong Kong; Carlo, *Il masnadieri* (Valencia); Adoniram, *La Reine de Saba*, Odyssey Opera; and Rodolfo, *La bohème*, Opera Colorado and in Hong Kong. Over the last several seasons, Chenes has covered Cavaradossi, *Tosca*; Pinkerton, *Madama Butterfly*; and Faust, *Faust* with Lyric Opera of Chicago. Other past roles include Don José, *Carmen*, Palm Beach Opera and Utah Opera; Alfredo, *La traviata*, New National Theatre (Tokyo) and Opera på Skäret Festival (Sweden); Riccardo, *Un ballo in maschera*, Austin Opera; Turiddu, *Cavalleria rusticana*, New Orleans Opera, Pinkerton, *Madama Butterfly*, Austin Opera; Rodolfo, *La bohème*, Welsh National

## MEET THE ARTISTS

Opera; Cavaradossi, *Tosca*, Reading Symphony and Minnesota Opera; Iopas, *Les Troyens*, Grand Théâtre de Genève; Pollione, *Norma*, Hong Kong. Chenes enjoyed great success as Cavaradossi in Seattle Opera's film version of *Tosca* and was enthusiastically received back to Palm Beach Opera as Don José, *Carmen*. This season, Chenes is thrilled to return to Chicago for *Don Carlos*, and he has accepted his first Metropolitan Opera contract as Cavaradossi (cover), *Tosca* for spring 2023. He also returns to Seattle Opera to sing Alfredo, *La traviata*.



### KAREN CHIA-LING HO |

*Butterfly* (*Cio-Cio-San*)

The 2023/24 season sees Karen Chia-ling Ho making her Opera Philadelphia debut as Cio-Cio-San, *Madama Butterfly*. She returns to The Metropolitan Opera as Mimi (cover), *La bohème* and San Francisco Opera as Cio-Cio-San (cover). Previously, Ms. Ho debuted at The Metropolitan Opera as Meretaten, *Akhnaten*. Recent roles include Princess Jia, *Bright Sheng's Dream of the Red Chamber*, San Francisco Opera; Liù, *Turandot*, St. Petersburg Opera; Tosca, *Tosca*, More Than Music Festival; Violetta, *La traviata*, Philharmonia Orchestra of New York, and Maria, *Der Diktator*, American Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Ho has presented music by Chinese composer Li Shaosheng with the American Composers Orchestra and appeared in concerts with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra. With the New Jersey Festival Orchestra, she presented the "Yellow River Cantata" and Strauss's Op. 27, among other selections. She has also appeared with the Musical Olympus Foundation and the San Jose Center for the Performing Arts. Ms. Ho was a finalist in the Belvedere Competition and the Francisco Viñas Competition. She received First Prize in the Mildred Miller International Voice Competition, Second Prize in the Marcello Giordani Foundation Vocal Competition, and a Sergio Franchi Music Foundation Grant. She was also a district winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Ms. Ho holds degrees from the Universities of TNUA and Tung-Hai in Vocal Performance, a

Master of Music degree from the Eastman School of Music, and an Artist Diploma from the College-Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati.



### JUNHAN CHOI |

*Commissioner/Registrar*

Baritone Junhan Choi, a native of South Korea, is an active opera, oratorio, and concert singer. His

2023/24 season engagements include Registrar & Commissioner, *Madama Butterfly*; Dandini (cover), *La Cenerentola*; and Fourth Stone, *Eurydice* with Boston Lyric Opera as part of his second year as a Jane and Steven Akin Emerging Artist. Mr. Choi has been a prize winner in many international competitions, such as the 54th Viñas International Voice Competition (Spain/Three Extraordinary Prizes – Mercedes Viñas, Victoria de los Ángeles, Franz Schubert), the Berliner International Music Competition (Germany/Golden Medal), Talents of the World International Voice Competition (First Place), MassOpera's Vocal Competition (First Place), Rochester International Vocal Competition, and the St. Botolph Emerging Artist Grant for excellence in music. He holds a Master's degree and a Graduate Diploma with a Presidential Scholarship from New England Conservatory of Music.



### ALICE CHUNG | *Suzuki*

American mezzo-soprano Alice Chung has been the recipient and winner of numerous awards, including ones from the The Sullivan Foundation, The Shoshana Foundation, and the Metropolitan National Council Auditions. Previous roles and covers include Suzuki, *Madama Butterfly*; Mistress Quickly, *Falstaff* (cover); Granny Jia, *Dream of the Red Chamber* (cover); Ježibaba, *Rusalka*; Die Hexe, *Hänsel und Gretel*; Larina, *Eugene Onegin*; Mercedes, *Carmen*; Carmen, *Carmen* (cover); Maddalena, *Rigoletto*; and Azucena, *Il trovatore* (cover). Ms. Chung has sung with Hawaii Opera Theatre, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, The Naples Philharmonic, Kansas City Symphony, Pittsburgh Festival Opera, United States Naval Academy, Tulsa Opera, Central City Opera, Chautauqua Opera, Music Academy of the West, and the prestigious Merola Opera Program,

from recital to mainstage. Her 2022-2023 season includes her house debut with Arizona Opera as Dritte Dame, *Die Zauberflöte*; her return to San Francisco Opera to cover Suzuki, *Madama Butterfly*; and her role and house debut as Death, *Le rossignol*, West Edge Opera; as well as concerts and recitals. She was most recently seen in recital at The Greene Space/WQXR and is scheduled to debut at Carnegie Hall in conjunction with The Gerda Lissner Foundation in May.



### TROY COOK | *Sharpless*

Renowned American baritone Troy Cook is a native of Henry County, Kentucky, and has performed in many of the world's greatest opera houses, including The Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera, Covent Garden, San Francisco Opera, La Monnaie, and Opera Bilbao. Mr. Cook's engagements during the 2022/23 season include returns to Opera Philadelphia, reprising Marcello in *La bohème*; and Virginia Opera, for his role debut as Major General Stanley in *The Pirates of Penzance*. With Palm Beach Opera, he makes his company debut in one of his most-frequently performed roles, Sharpless, *Madama Butterfly*; and also sings Germont, *La traviata*, Inland Northwest Opera. Mr. Cook created the role of Father Palmer in the world premiere of the Pulitzer Prize-winning opera *Silent Night* by Kevin Puts & Mark Campbell with Minnesota Opera, singing further performances of the role with Utah Opera, Austin Opera, and Atlanta Opera. Other recent engagements include Sharpless, *Madama Butterfly*, Washington National Opera, Portland Opera and Central City Opera; Watty Watkins, *Lady Be Good*, Teatro di San Carlo; Enrico in a new Laurent Pelly production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Opera Philadelphia; Rodrigo, *Don Carlo*, Washington National Opera and Opera Philadelphia; Valentin, *Faust*, Macau Festival; and Ford, *Falstaff*, San Diego Opera.



### HYUNGJIN SON | *Uncle Bonzo*

Baritone Hyungjin Son, from Seoul, South Korea, is pursuing his master's degree at New England Conservatory under the tutelage of Bradley Williams. He earned a Bachelor of

Music in vocal performance from Seoul National University, and a graduate certificate from the Opera Institute of Boston University. At BU, Mr. Son performed as Don Alfonso, *Così fan tutte*, Mr. Putnam, *If I were you*, Pa Zegner in *Proving Up*, and Sir Thomas in *Mansfield Park*. He also performed as a soloist in Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem* with the BU Symphony Orchestra at Symphony Hall. As a studio artist at Aspen Music Festival, he covered the role of Ford in *Falstaff* with international bass-baritone Bryn Terfel in the title role; he also covered the title role in *Don Giovanni*. Recently, Mr. Son made his debut as Don Giovanni, *Don Giovanni*, Estates Theatre (Prague). He was named a Boston district winner in the 2022 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and a national semifinalist in the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition.



### RODELL ROSEL | *Goro*

Originally from the Philippines, Grammy-nominated tenor Rodell Aure Rosel appears regularly in major opera houses, including The Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Los Angeles Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and the Royal Opera House. He is primarily known for his superb portrayals of character roles: Monostatos, Goro, Mime and Loge, Basilio, the Four Servants in *The Tales of Hoffmann*, Tanzmeister, and Spolelta. He made his Metropolitan Opera debut as Valzacchi in *Der Rosenkavalier*, opposite Renée Fleming, Susan Graham, and Sir Thomas Allen. He originated the role of Ong Chi Seng in Paul Moravec's *The Letter* at Santa Fe Opera, as well as of Anthony Candelino in Terrence McNally and Jake Heggie's *Great Scott* at Dallas Opera, which starred Joyce DiDonato and Frederica von Stade, and was conducted by Patrick Summers. He debuted at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden as Monostatos in the David McVicar production of *The Magic Flute*, and sang in US premieres in the Barrie Kosky production at Los Angeles Opera and the Julie Taymor production at The Metropolitan Opera. Other notable roles include Der Zwerg, *Der Zwerg*; Albert Herring, *Albert Herring*; Tamino, *The Magic Flute*; and Don José, *Carmen*.



## MEET THE ARTISTS



### **VERA SAVAGE** | *Kate Pinkerton*

Ms. Savage's recent seasons included roles as New Ofglen in Boston Lyric Opera's highly acclaimed production of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Nada in BLO/Opera Philadelphia's production of *Svadba*, and Bice in Spoleto Festival's *Pia de' Tolomei*. She also sang Salieri's *Requiem* with the Commonwealth Chorale, Bernstein's *Jeremiah Symphony* and *Arias and Barcarolles* with the Glens Falls Symphony Orchestra, and a sold-out performance of the Verdi *Requiem* with the Metropolitan Chorale in Boston's Jordan Hall. Ms. Savage has performed with numerous opera companies, festivals, and orchestras across the United States, including Opera Saratoga, Florentine Opera, Spoleto Festival USA, Opera on the James, and at Seiji Ozawa Hall at the Tanglewood Institute. Ms. Savage's recent engagements include performances with White Snake Projects, Boston Lyric Opera, and American Lyric Theater. She is featured on the albums *Music to Hear* and *Who is Sylvia* by the Shakespeare Projects.



### **NEKO UMPHENOUR** |

*Dolore (Butterfly's Child)*

*Madama Butterfly* is Neko Umphenour's opera stage debut. Neko's interest in opera, film, and circus developed from a curiosity for storytelling, sup-

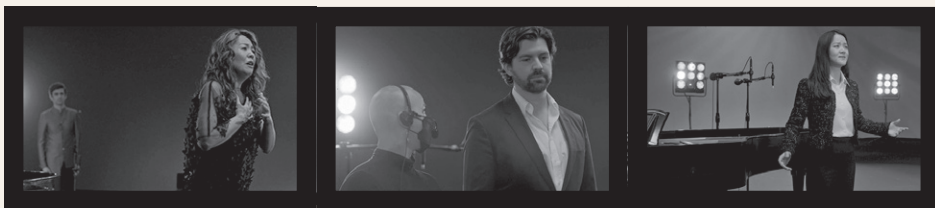
ported by living amongst a community of artists, friends, and neighbors in Boston's Fort Point Arts Neighborhood. Neko plays the role of a young character in a forthcoming science fiction narrative film and is starting kindergarten at the Eliot School.



### **CASSIE WANG** | *Solo Dancer*

Cassie Wang (she/her) is a Cambridge-based multidisciplinary artist working in contemporary dance, design, and animation. Originally from Kansas City, she received her BA from Pomona College in computer science with minors in dance and media studies. She trained with the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance. Wang is a company member with KAIROS Dance Theater and VLA DANCE, and was previously a member of Tristian Griffin Dance Company. Her other performance and collaboration credits include Boston Lyric Opera, Dafi Altabeb, Jessi Stegall, Derion Loman, Liz Lerman, and Ohad Naharin. Wang's choreography has been presented by NACHMO Boston, Dunamis, and Resilience Dance Company, and she has been supported in her professional development through Dunamis' Emerging Artist Fellowship (2022) and MIDDAY's BIPOC Professional Dancer Mentorship Program (2023). This year, she will be a teaching assistant for the Gaga course at Harvard University and a Dance Lab Resident at the Boston Center for the Arts.

# THE BUTTERFLY PROCESS



From left, Omar Najmi & Nina Yoshida Nelsen, Zach Borichevsky, and Yulan Piao perform in *B. — an artistic outcome of The Butterfly Process* — celebrating works by Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander composers and writers.

**M**adama Butterfly is loved by audiences and remains an essential part of the traditional repertoire. But the opera's history has a reputation for portraying inaccurate representations of Japanese culture, contributing to stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans.

Spurred by a postponed production of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* for Boston Lyric Opera's 2020/21 Season, BLO began conversations with artists from the postponed production, staff, cultural organizations, scholars, and community members. Our goal was to reexamine the history and legacy of this opera in light of heightened racism toward Asian communities, particularly in the areas of cultural appropriation, race, and gender stereotypes — and the wide-ranging impact of this opera on Asian artists.

This became known as *The Butterfly Process*, BLO's commitment to unpacking the layers of this story and the historical context of the work, aiming to confront the racist elements of its legacy and create space for meaningful engagement about future productions.

• “*The Butterfly Process* is part of BLO's commitment to authentic storytelling with its artists and for its audiences that informs a new approach to presenting operas of the traditional canon today.

• “The goal here is for everyone to participate in an art form that hasn't traditionally been inclusive, and to strengthen our communities and audiences through the music and stories we present. I believe we can do it by engaging with and listening to people of many backgrounds and life experiences and incorporating that into our work.”

– **Bradley Vernatter**, “Saying Yes to Puccini, but No to His Stereotypes”  
*The New York Times*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [BLO.ORG/BUTTERFLY-PROCESS](https://blo.org/butterfly-process)**

# ARTISTIC & PRODUCTION PERSONNEL

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Anderson Nunnelley *Assistant Stage Director*▼  
Makenzie Wright *Assistant Stage Manager*  
Jolie Frazer-Madge *Assistant Stage Manager*  
Chris Kristant *Technical Director*  
Steven Doucette *Properties Supervisor*  
Josh Wombles *Properties Co-Supervisor*  
Maxx Finn *Lighting Director*  
Talia Elise *Assistant Lighting Designer*  
Liz Perlman *Costume Director*  
Gale Buckley *Costume Supervisor*  
Alexandria Hoffman *Costume Design Assistant*  
Brigid DeAngelis *Costume Design Assistant*  
Natalia St Jean *Surtitle Creator & Operator*

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William Manley *Music Librarian*

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Brett Hodgdon▼  
*Chorus Director*

### Sopranos

Sol Bentley  
Alisa Cassola  
Yeonjae Cho  
Melynda Davis  
Marie McCarville  
Simeng Wu  
Angela Yam•

### Altos

Jaime Korkos  
Mary Kray  
Jeannette Lee  
Katherine Maysek  
Arielle Rogers-Wilkey  
Madison Smith  
Sarah Taylor

### Tenors

Kartik Aysola  
Zhengyi Bai  
Josaphat Contreras  
Frank Levar  
Christopher Maher  
Patrick Starke  
Fred C. VanNess, Jr.•

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Joe St Croix *First Assistant Production Carpenter*  
Tyler "T.J." Willis *Second Assistant Production Carpenter*  
Maxx Finn *Head Production Electrician*  
Jake Seibert *Lighting Programmer*  
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Erin Vadala *First Assistant Wardrobe*  
Melinda Abreu *Head Hair & Makeup*  
Sharon Ferreira *First Assistant Hair & Makeup*

## COVERS

Emily Michiko Jensen *Butterfly (Cio-Cio-San)*•  
Zhengyi Bai *Goro*  
Hyunsoon Kim *Uncle Bonzo/Commissioner/Registrar*

## DANCERS

Azamat Asangul  
Cassie Wang

• Boston Lyric Opera Jane and Steven Akin Emerging Artist  
▼ Boston Lyric Opera Jane and Steven Akin Emerging Artist Alum

## UNIONS

The artists and stage managers employed on these productions are members of the American Guild of Musical Artists. All musicians are members of the American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada.

Many of the scenic, costume, and lighting designers are members of United Scenic Artists, Local USA-829 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE). Stagehands are represented by Local #11 of IATSE. Wardrobe crew are represented by Local #764 of IATSE.

BLO is a member of OPERA America, the national service organization for opera in the US and Canada.



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 Jodi Hagen *Violin II*  
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 Heather Braun Bakken  
 Piotr Buczek  
 Robert Curtis  
 Rose Drucker  
 Lisa Goddard  
 Rohan Gregory  
 Annegret Klaua  
 Yeolim Nam  
 Paula Oakes  
 Yumi Okada  
 Theo Ramsey  
 Megumi Stohs Lewis  
 Roksana Sudol  
 Asuka Usui  
 Lena Wong  
 Hikaru Yonezaki

### Viola

Kenneth Stalberg  
*Principal*  
 Anne Black  
 Joan Ellersick  
 Noriko Futagami  
 Anna Griffis  
 Emily Rome

### Cello

Loewi Lin *Principal*  
 Melanie Dyball  
 Jing Li  
 Aron Zolkowicz

### Bass

Robert Lynam *Principal*  
 Barry Boettger  
 Kevin Green

### Flute

Lisa Hennessy  
*Acting Principal*  
 Rachel Braude  
 Meghan Miller

### Oboe

Nancy Dimock *Principal*  
 Mary Cicconetti

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 Stephanie Busby

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Lauren Winter  
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 Nicholas Auer  
 Michael Bellofatto  
 Iris Rosenstein

### Trumpet

Joseph Foley  
*Acting Principal*  
 Jesse Levine  
 Mary-Lynne Bohn

### Trombone

Robert Couture *Principal*  
 Robert Hoveland  
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### Tuba

Donald Rankin *Principal*

### Timpani

Jeffrey Fischer *Principal*

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*Acting Principal*



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**Now in its 47th Season, Boston Lyric Opera is dedicated to creating compelling operatic experiences throughout the greater Boston area that welcome new audiences, break new ground, and enrich community life.**

Since its founding in 1976, Boston Lyric Opera has produced world and US premieres, Pulitzer Prize-winning operas, and notable commissions and coproductions, ranging from live stage shows to films streamed worldwide.

BLO has partnered with organizations such as Covent Garden, San Francisco Opera, Detroit Opera, and more, and continues to be a destination for leading artists, conductors, directors, and designers from around the world. Each season, BLO invests in Jane & Steven Akin Emerging Artists to hone their craft and prepare for the next step in their careers. Alongside its mainstage season, BLO presents wide-reaching community and educational public programs and performances year-round, some at its Midway Artist Studios headquarters, others in partnership with the Boston Public Library, Boston Public Schools, and cultural organizations across New England.

BLO launched a new five-year strategic plan in 2022, prioritizing four strategic pillars: Programming, Community, Space, and Leadership, along with a renewed commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility. BLO employs nearly 500 artists and creative professionals annually — vocalists, instrumentalists, artisans, stagehands, costumers, scenic designers, administrators, and beyond. The Company is proud to play a significant and meaningful role in Boston's vibrant arts community.

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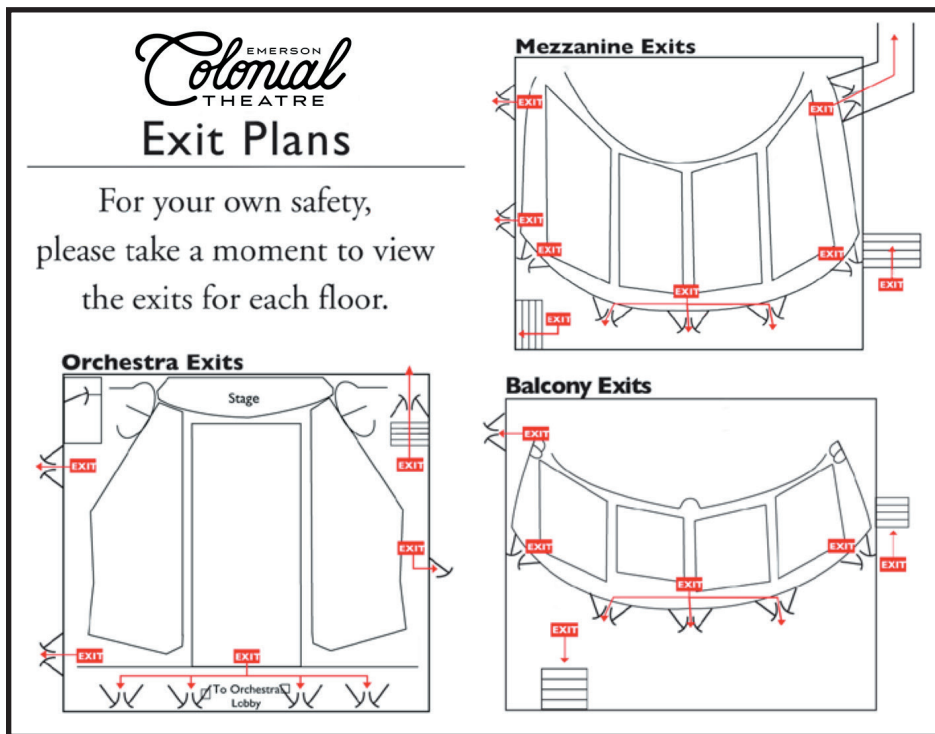
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