



## **BOSTON LYRIC OPERA EXPANDS CREATIVE SPACE WITH MIDWAY ARTIST STUDIOS IN FORT POINT ARTS NEIGHBORHOOD**

*Expansion will comprise 16,000 s.f. at Midway to create the “Opera & Community Studios” and grow a hub of artistic creation and cultural collaboration.*

Boston, MA – June 20, 2024 – [Boston Lyric Opera](#) (BLO), in collaboration with [Midway Artist Studios](#), will establish a new artmaking and community space for Boston's cultural communities. The company has signed a multi-year lease for a 14,000-square-foot signature location at Midway Artist Studios in Boston's Fort Point neighborhood, expanding from its existing 2,000-square-foot studio. BLO's “Opera & Community Studios” will anchor the nearly 50-year-old company's artistic work with rehearsal and production space, and will further grow the vibrant Fort Point neighborhood with a place where artists and cultural organizations across disciplines can thrive.

In addition to being BLO's administrative hub, the Opera & Community Studios will accommodate a full range of artistic and creative activities, including music and staging rehearsals, public programs, education and community events, and producing operations. The Studios will welcome artists and cultural organizations from Midway, Fort Point and across Greater Boston, fostering a collaborative environment and hosting convenings that strengthen the performing arts community. BLO will continue to present its mainstage shows at venues throughout the city.

“This new space marks a milestone for BLO, for Boston, and for the broader arts community,” says **Bradley Vernatter, BLO Stanford Calderwood General Director & CEO**. “It's impossible to overstate the importance of access to appropriate, dedicated arts and cultural space in Boston, especially space for artistic preparation and rehearsal for the performing arts,” he says. “The new studios will become a dependable place for individual artists and arts companies to collaborate and create.”

The Opera & Community Studios are situated within Midway Artist Studios, a 200,000-plus square foot, artist-owned nonprofit building that provides work-live space for 89 artists in all artistic mediums. The space will be used in its current multi-level, open-format state over the next year, with a new, dedicated \$10.5 million fundraising initiative to support the expansion and a potential

build-out of additional studios, support spaces, and amenities aimed for completion by the start of the 2026/27 Season, which is BLO's 50th anniversary season.

In addition to housing BLO's rehearsals and artistic operations, the space will accommodate other performing arts and non-profit organizations for a variety of uses. For example, it recently hosted an event for the projection-based digital art festival Illuminus; the non-profit journal Boston Art Review held a launch event for its May issue; and Commonwealth Shakespeare Company will use the space for rehearsals of its free-to-the-public summer production, "The Winter's Tale."

"Opera is a cross-disciplinary art form that elevates all art forms," says **Raber Umphenour, President of Midway Artist Collective**. "So Midway, with its wide variety of work-live artists, is a natural home for Boston Lyric Opera. The fulfillment of this shared vision is the culmination of a decades-long effort to find a creative collaborator for this unique space. Together, Midway Artist Studios and Boston Lyric Opera will contribute to a strengthening of the performing arts throughout the City of Boston as we continue to grow the cultural presence in Fort Point."

Fort Point is one of New England's largest artists' communities, with three dedicated artist buildings and cultural organizations like Artists for Humanity and the Boston Children's Museum, and institutions like GrubStreet and the Institute for Contemporary Art nearby. "Since joining Midway, its residents and leadership have welcomed us openly, along with the entire neighborhood whose residents have worked for decades to create and maintain artist housing and work spaces," Vernatter says. "We are proud to contribute to this community – by uplifting Fort Point's artistic history and expanding its cultural footprint through new opportunities."

While the Opera & Community Studios space is a leap forward in satisfying many needs for artistic preparation and operations for BLO and others, Vernatter says, the company continues to explore collaborative solutions for a dedicated venue for large-scale mainstage performances that meets the needs of modern audiences and artists across disciplines. "One of Boston's greatest unrealized opportunities is a modern performance venue to harness the artistic ambitions and scale of opera, join communities across different cultural sectors, and support the economic stability of many artists and art forms," he says. Meanwhile, BLO will continue to present its mainstage shows at various venues throughout the city.

Members of the public will have a chance to tour the Opera & Community Studios space during this fall's [Fort Point Open Studios](#) in October.

## **REACTION FROM CITY LEADERS**

**Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture Chief Kara Elliott-Ortega** highlighted the significance of BLO's Fort Point expansion: "This is exciting news for one of the city's largest and most enduring performing arts companies – and the city's largest artist work-live artist housing project. BLO has been part of the city's cultural fabric for nearly 50 years; this underscores good things for Midway, BLO and performing artists who will make valuable use of this new cultural space. The creation of more accessible and affordable rehearsal and studio and venue space like this continues to be a priority for the city and our performing arts community.

**City of Boston Chief of Housing and Director of the Mayor's Office of Housing Sheila A. Dillon** applauded the expansion and collaboration. "Congratulations to Midway Artist Studios, Boston Lyric Opera and many other local organizations on the creation of a new cultural space that

will benefit not only the Fort Point neighborhood, but all of Boston,” Dillon says. “The unique integration of affordable artist work-live housing with creative cultural performing arts and rehearsal spaces is particularly noteworthy. The residents of Midway continue to create a welcoming and vibrant community by providing both income restricted artist housing and space for local artists and performing arts. It is rewarding to see the long term investments in artist housing yielding benefits for organizations large and small.”

### **REACTION FROM ARTISTIC AND OTHER LEADERS**

**BLO Board Chair Alicia Cooney** and **Board President Wayne Davis** shared enthusiasm for the project as a reflection of the company’s future: “The establishment of this new space is a leap forward for opera and for Boston. It provides a dependable environment for creative work and rehearsals and also reinforces our commitment to enriching the cultural landscape of Boston,” Cooney says. “This wouldn’t have been possible without the extraordinary generosity of the many people who have contributed to making our shared vision a reality. We welcome the broader community to join us in bringing this space to life for the performing arts in Boston.”

**BLO Artistic Director Nina Yoshida Nelsen** called the project “a new era for opera in Boston.” “A dedicated studio space to support our artists, opera artists across the Boston area, and the broader cultural sector is a thrilling thing to provide,” Nelsen says. “The studios will enable cross-discipline collaborations and welcome audiences and neighbors into the artistic and creative process. It is a place for our community to gather and participate in extraordinary artmaking together. This is a new era for opera in Boston. ”

**Boston Opera Collaborative Executive Director Alexis Peart**, who has performed with BLO and is a member of its Emerging Artist cohort, recognizes a benefit in the new space for smaller opera companies. “To have a centralized location where opera artists and other makers can gather to work on creative projects, get inspiration from like-minded artists, and find a place for rehearsals and informal showings of in-process works will be an incredible asset to the Boston arts scene,” Peart says. “The new space is sure to be a game-changer. I could not be more excited to see its growth and continued development.”



Rendering of rehearsal at Opera & Community Studios. Courtesy BLO/Midway.

**Founding Artistic Director of Commonwealth Shakespeare Company (CSC) Steve Maler**, who directed BLO & CSC’s co-production of *Romeo & Juliet*” in 2022, says “Boston has a severe shortage of affordable and accessible rehearsal spaces and performing arts venues. We’re so thrilled that CSC’s upcoming free production of “*The Winter’s Tale*” will rehearse at this new location and we look forward to using the space for future rehearsals, events and performances.”

### **ABOUT BOSTON LYRIC OPERA**

Over its nearly 50 years producing opera in Boston, Boston Lyric Opera's (BLO) mission is to build curiosity, enthusiasm and support for opera through compelling experiences that connect, inspire and reflect our community. With more than 170 performances each year on main stages, in school-based youth performances, and through free public concerts, BLO tells stories that reflect the diversity of our community. Learn more about BLO [here](#).

### **ABOUT MIDWAY ARTIST STUDIOS**

As Boston’s largest affordable work-live building, Midway Artist Studios was established in 2005 for artists to work and live affordably in Boston, when the real estate boom swept through Fort Point and displaced hundreds of working artists. Midway Artist Studios is unique as the only remaining artist rental building in Fort Point. Learn more about Midway Artist Studios [here](#).

### **ABOUT FORT POINT’S ARTISTIC HISTORY**

In the 1970s, artists began moving to Fort Point after being displaced from other studios. They found affordable studio space in the timber and masonry buildings owned by the Boston Wharf Company. By 1980 the neighborhood held its first Open Studios events and formed the Fort Point Arts Community. Fort Point remains a unique neighborhood, with more housing and creative projects on the horizon including 50 new units of artist work-live housing directly on the Fort Point Channel as part of the Channelside Development, along with a 1000-person capacity amphitheater, and ground-floor cultural space. Learn more about Fort Point’s artistic history [here](#).

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**MEDIA CONTACT** Vernatter, Umphenour and others affiliated with the “Opera & Community Studios” are available for interviews. Contact John Michael Kennedy, [jmk@jmkpr.com](mailto:jmk@jmkpr.com) / 781-620-1761 (o) / 212-842-1752 (c/t).



A recent BLO event in the new Opera & Community Studios space. Photo courtesy BLO.