

BOSTONLYRICOPERA

NINA YOSHIDA NELSEN IS BLO'S NEW ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, WITH NEW ARTISTIC COLLABORATORS

A veteran singer and industry leader familiar to Boston opera audiences, and a Boston University graduate, Nelsen takes a key artistic position.

Lauded theater artist Anne Bogart becomes Artistic Associate, tying formally to the company as a stage director, and contributor to repertoire and production.

Music Director David Angus renews his contract for three more years.



BOSTON, MA – January 29, 2024 – Boston Lyric Opera (BLO) **General Director & CEO Bradley Vernatter** announces today the appointment of **Nina Yoshida Nelsen** (left) as the company's new Artistic Director after an extensive, industry-wide search process. Under Vernatter's leadership, Nelsen will work closely with Music Director **David Angus** and the BLO artistic team to lead the organization's performance and artistic programming wing, including designing future seasons and leading casting. Nelsen steps into her new role February 1.

A celebrated Japanese American mezzo-soprano with a distinguished career across the country, Nelsen brings to BLO a wealth of experience and a deep passion for the artform. Renowned for portrayals of Suzuki in the opera "Madama Butterfly" (which she has performed nearly 200 times), and as co-founder of the Asian Opera Alliance, Nelsen's artistic vision, her commitment to excellence, and her advocacy for equity among opera artists have made important marks on the American opera industry. Nelsen plans to continue her performing career while serving as BLO's Artistic Director.

"Since joining BLO in 2021, Nina's partnership has provided strong artistic collaboration," Vernatter says. "As an Artistic Advisor, she showcased a remarkable ability to develop artistic programs, nurture artists, achieve strategic goals and engage community stakeholders while upholding BLO's commitment to artistic excellence. Combined with her multifaceted industry experience, her dedication to pushing artistic boundaries, and her familiarity with BLO's creative landscape, Nina is an ideal artistic leader for our Company's future."

Photo this page: Nina Yoshida Nelsen by Icarus Photography

"I'm thrilled to become BLO's Artistic Director," Nelsen says. "In many ways this is a full circle moment for me, having trained as violinist and opera singer at Boston University, and having performed my first professional opera engagement in New England. I look forward to leveraging my performing engagements both nationally and internationally with other opera companies to BLO's benefit while investing in the Boston community."

"Since my first day of rehearsals in 2021, I knew BLO as a company I wanted to be a part of...a remarkable place to create and innovate," Nelsen says. "I appreciate Brad's leadership, vision and commitment to this art form – and the artists who bring it to life. It is a delight to collaborate with a team that works tirelessly to create magic."

"Active, performing singers rarely have the opportunity to translate their expertise into positions of leadership at opera companies," Nelsen says. "The future of our art form depends on integrating diverse perspectives into decision-making. It's exciting to create a new way forward for our industry. And the opportunity to do this at BLO brings me great joy."

NINA YOSHIDA NELSEN'S TIME AT BU, BLO AND BEYOND

Nelsen made her BLO performing debut in 2021 as Mamma Lucia in a production of "Cavalleria Rusticana." She was featured as a singer and storyteller in the filmed documentary-concert "B.," which marked an artistic culmination of BLO's "The Butterfly Process." She joined the company as Artistic Advisor in 2021, participating in artistic discussions and decisions, company auditions and more. Most recently she was a dramaturg for BLO's acclaimed production of "Madama Butterfly" in 2023.

Nelsen has performed for audiences throughout North America and Europe, with a repertoire including traditional and contemporary roles. Her career has included performances with Washington National Opera, Lincoln Center, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, as well as Avery Fisher Hall and Carnegie Hall in New York, among many others. This season, Nelsen sang the role of Melissa in Handel's "Alcina" with Seattle Opera, where she is a frequent performer, and the title role of "Carmen" with Indianapolis Opera. She makes her house debut with Opera Carolina this winter as Suzuki in "Madama Butterfly," makes a role debut as Marcellina in "Le Nozze di Figaro" at Utah Opera and reprises the role of Mother Chen in "An American Soldier" at NYC's Perelman Performing Arts Center.

As Co-Founder and Board President of the Asian Opera Alliance, Nelsen works to uplift Asian artists, and advocate for greater representation within the industry; she has received national attention for her work on stage and behind the scenes. Nelsen was recently featured in print and video coverage from TIME Magazine, and was the subject of an NHK World documentary centered on the opera "An American Dream" by Jack Perla and Jessica Murphy Moo, and her origination of the role Hiroko Kobayashi at Seattle Opera.

An alumna of Boston University, where she received an undergraduate degree in violin and psychology in 2001, and a Master's degree in voice in 2003, Nelsen also studied at Philadelphia's prestigious Academy of Vocal Arts, receiving an Artist Diploma in 2009.

Nelsen's busy singing career has given her on-the-ground insights into the way companies of all sizes operate around the country. "As a singer, advocate, mother and woman of color, I have a unique perspective on and experience within our industry," Nelsen says. "This intimate industry knowledge guides my work as an advocate. And it will continue to inform my leadership at BLO," she says.

Her Artistic Director responsibilities will include establishing an active presence in Boston – and throughout the international opera community – by participating in civic activities, discourse, panels and advocacy, and by connecting to BLO's internal and external communities to recognize and address their needs.

For the first year, Nelsen will commute to Boston from her home in Bloomington, Ind., where she lives with husband Jeff Nelsen (a member of the world-renowned Canadian Brass and a professor of French Horn at Indiana University) and their sons Rhys and Blair. Nelsen will spend considerable time in Boston, participating in rehearsal processes, attending performances, and engaging with the BLO and Boston communities.

INDUSTRY LEADERS ON NINA YOSHIDA NELSEN

- **Vimbayi Kaziboni**, Assistant Professor of Orchestral Studies and Contemporary Music at Boston Conservatory at Berklee, winner of the 2024 Ditson Conductor's Award, and an artistic advisor for Boston Lyric Opera, says "we [BLO] are very privileged as a company to have my dear colleague, Nina, take the helm of our artistic matters in her new role. I cannot think of anyone more deserving. She is a profoundly thoughtful artist and collaborator who makes it her business to move souls with anything she touches. She sees the big picture and takes it on with fierce courage, inspiring those around her with great conviction."
- **Matthew Ozawa**, Chief Artistic Administration Officer at Lyric Opera of Chicago, and an independent stage director for opera and theater, says he is "absolutely thrilled for Nina, for BLO, and for the impact Nina's new position will bring to the company, to Boston, and to the opera industry." "I have had the fortune to work with Nina and to experience her committed, thoughtful and beautiful artistry," Ozawa says. "I've also witnessed her voice serving as a beacon for the Asian American community through her activism. She is building a bridge for the next generation, and she will champion BLO's artistic future for years to come."
- **Christina Scheppelmann**, General Director of Seattle Opera, says she got to know Nelsen during the company's performance of "Bound" in their 2022-23 Season and again last fall during "Alcina." "Nina performed beautifully in both productions," Scheppelmann says. "To have an accomplished singer, an excellent musician and a caring, smart, curious performer become an Artistic Director is great for BLO – and the art form at large. I am very excited for her and for BLO's future."

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ANNE BOGART IN A NEW ROLE WITH BLO

Joining Nelsen and the BLO Artistic team in shaping the company's artistic future is acclaimed theater director **Anne Bogart**, who will serve as Artistic Associate. Bogart is celebrated for her visionary approach to live performance and previously directed two highly successful BLO productions. Vernatter says he was eager to make Bogart a part of the company's artistic leadership. In this role, her expertise and innovative perspective will enhance BLO's artistic offerings, he says.

Anne Bogart (r., photo by Nana Dakin) is among the most celebrated artists in contemporary theater and performance. Her interest in opera of all kinds has brought her to Boston twice for two indelible shows: 2019's "The Handmaid's Tale," by Poul Ruders, which was designed and produced for Harvard's Ray Laviertes Pavilion, and 2023's "Bluebeard's Castle/Four Songs" by Bela Bartók and Alma Mahler at the vast Flynn Cruiseport Boston/Black Falcon Terminal. Both were critical successes and audience standouts.



In addition to more directing opportunities with BLO, Bogart's new position makes her a resource for the company's artistic team. She will contribute to BLO's mainstage repertoire planning, as well as ensure dramaturgical soundness and artistic excellence during production concept and design. Bogart says she joins the company "feeling optimistic about the future of BLO...with Bradley Vernatter and Nina Yoshida Nelsen, and the magnificent artists, administrators, designers and technicians who share their mission."

"I feel fortunate to have directed two operas for BLO," Bogart says. "Over the course of those monumental projects, my admiration and awe for the courage and entrepreneurial spirit of BLO grew exponentially. Now I am looking forward to joining the organization in a more ongoing role, both as a stage director and an advisor."

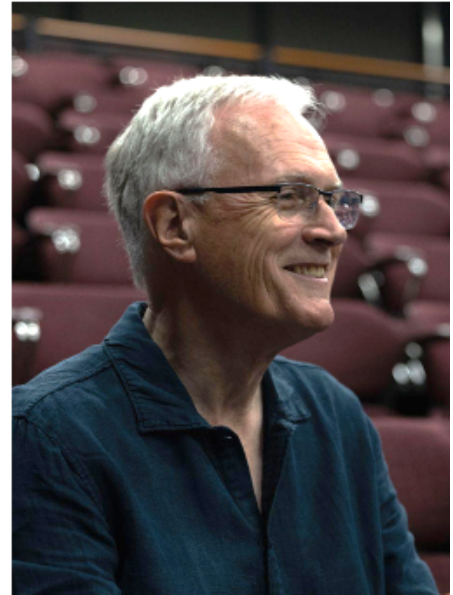
"I hope to bring a useful artistic and practical perspective to the BLO organization as it moves into a groundbreaking future," Bogart says. "With local, national and international crises escalating, I feel an ever-increasing need to be part of an enterprise that brings micro-worlds of beauty and meaning into being, and invites audiences to savor stories and music that encompass what it means to live in concert with others."

"Anne brings an extraordinary legacy to enrich BLO's artistic team," Bradley Vernatter says. "Her signature approach to creating theatrical experiences that open our minds and invite us to engage with the world – and each other – in new ways, has elevated our previous collaborations, and will enhance BLO's offerings as she joins our team in this new capacity."

[MEDIA NOTE: More bio information on Bogart is at the end of this release.]

ANGUS EXTENDS CONTRACT THREE MORE YEARS

BLO Music Director David Angus (r., photo by Kathy Wittman), who has worked with the company since 2010, renews his contract for three more years. Angus has conducted dozens of operas at BLO during his tenure and received consistent critical acclaim for an ability to create robust sound in a variety of theater and installation spaces, and orchestral configurations. The extension brings Angus into and through his 15th season (2024-25) as Music Director.



“David Angus introduced me to BLO more than ten years ago and has been my key partner in artistic leadership and musical excellence,” Vernatter says. “I am thrilled we are renewing his commitment to the company alongside Nina and Anne’s new appointments.”

Angus is based in England and travels widely to conduct, including regular performances at the BBC Symphony Orchestra and around the world. He has held music director and leadership roles at Glimmerglass Opera, The Symphony Orchestra of Flanders, and Glyndebourne. Angus and Bogart worked together earlier in their careers, having staged Vincenzo Bellini’s “Montecchi e Capuleti” in 2008 and Georges Bizet’s “Carmen” in 2011, both at Glimmerglass.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR ROLE AND THE SEARCH PROCESS

When Vernatter was appointed General Director & CEO in 2022, he recommended investing in the Artistic Director role as a separate position in order to accomplish the company’s ambitious strategic plan goals.

The search committee for Artistic Director was announced in early 2023, led by P&C Consulting. The committee comprised board and staff members, and initially included Nelsen in her role as Artistic Advisor. “The committee undertook a robust search process, interviewing dozens of candidates,” Vernatter says. “At the point Nina withdrew from the committee to submit her interest in the role, her existing relationship to the company and the Boston community had deepened with her work on “Madama Butterfly,” creating excitement for the possibility of expanding her impact at BLO.”

“Working as part of the *Butterfly* creative team wholly reframed my career ambitions,” Nelsen says of her pivot. “As a working artist at the height of my career, my performance schedule did not allow me to dive deeply into community relationships. ‘Butterfly’ gave me the opportunity to shape the future of operatic storytelling while engaging with many people in Boston. My new role allows me to further deepen these relationships and storytelling work in the city, while expanding my ability to impact our industry more broadly.”

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THE BLO ARTISTIC TEAM

As General Director & CEO, Bradley Vernatter continues in the company's top leadership role, with executive and artistic responsibilities. In the company's expanded artistic structure, Nelsen takes a key leadership role alongside Angus and Bogart. Rounding out the artistic team are: **Artistic Advisor Vimbayi Kaziboni**, who joined in 2020 to offer a key musical and curatorial voice; Artistic Advisor **John Conklin**, a distinguished creative and designer who has been an integral part of BLO since becoming an Artistic Advisor in 2002; and newly named Head of Music **Brett Hodgdon** who also continues as the company's Chorus Director.

More details about Boston Lyric Opera and its upcoming productions are available at blo.org.

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MORE ABOUT ANNE BOGART

Audiences around the world have seen Anne Bogart's ground-breaking artistry for more than 50 years. In 1992, she co-founded and became co-artistic director of the New York-based Saratoga International Theater Institute (SITI). She directed more than 30 SITI works at venues worldwide, taking innovative approaches to original creations and re-imagining classics. SITI closed its producing activities in 2022, ending Bogart's three-decade tenure.

Bogart is the author of six books and the recipient of honorary doctorates from the Cornish School of the Arts, Bard College and Skidmore College, as well as a Duke Artist Fellowship, a United States Artists Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Rockefeller/Bellagio Fellowship, and a Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Residency Fellowship. As a professor at Columbia University, Bogart leads the school's MFA directing program, whose alumni include Diane Paulus, Rachel Chavkin and Darko Tresnjak.

Bogart has staged numerous operas, including Wagner's "Tristan and Isolde," Handel's "Alcina," Dvořák's "Dimitrij," Kurt Weill's "Lost in the Stars," Verdi's "Macbeth," Bellini's "Norma," and Bizet's "Carmen." In 2019 she directed BLO's East Coast premiere of "The Handmaid's Tale," by Poul Ruders and Paul Bentley, based on Margaret Atwood's best-selling novel and produced at Harvard's Lavietes Basketball Arena. Bogart also helmed "Bluebeard's Castle/Four Songs" for BLO in 2023 at the Flynn Cruiseport Boston/Black Falcon Terminal in South Boston.

Born in Newport, R.I., Bogart divides her time between homes in New York and London with her wife, Rena Fogel.

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MEDIA CONTACT

Downloadable photos of Nina Yoshida Nelsen are available [here](#).

For interviews with Nina Yoshida Nelsen and other members of the BLO team, access to leaders who can speak to her industry impact, or for photos and other assets, contact John Michael Kennedy, jmk@jmkpr.com, 781-620-1761 (office) or 212-842-1752 (cell/text).