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## BLO's new season one of love stories across the centuries

By A.Z. Madonna

GLOBE STAFF

A new production of Puccini's "Madama Butterfly" set in 1940s California and led by an Asian-American creative team will open Boston Lyric Opera's 2023-24 season, which includes four productions representing stories of love from several eras of opera.

The opera company just announced details of its upcoming season, which also includes Rossini's "La Cenerentola" (Cinderella), a chamber version of "Eurydice" by Medfield-raised composer Matthew Aucoin (son of Globe theater critic Don Aucoin) and librettist Sarah Ruhl and the rarely performed "The Anonymous Lover," a 1780 opera by Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, who is the subject of a recently released biopic starring Kelvin Harrison Jr.

"Madama Butterfly" was initially scheduled to open the 2020 fall season and was initially pushed to 2021, but in fall 2021 the company instead embarked on "The Butterfly Process," a season-long exploration of the opera, its



ELI SCHMIDT

**Phil Chan will direct the BLO's new production of "Madama Butterfly."**

history, and its reputation for stereotypes that harmed Japanese people and other Asians. The project included several online panel discussions moderated by choreographer and arts advocate Phil Chan, as well as a film series featuring the cast that was booked for the postponed 2020 production.

Chan, the co-founder of advocacy group Final Bow for Yellowface, will direct his first opera with BLO's "Butterfly." The new production reimagines the title character as a Japanese-American performer in 1940s California, where white audiences flocked to Chinatown nightclubs to see Asian dancers.

"We need to make its stories relevant to the audiences and the people of our time, while making sure the timeless Puccini score is still heard," said Chan in a statement.

"Butterfly," which will be staged at the Emerson Colonial Theater, stars Taiwanese soprano Karen Chia-Ling Ho as Butterfly opposite American tenor Dominick Chenes as Pinkerton and American mezzo-soprano Alice Chung as Suzuki. The dramaturgy team includes "Forbidden City, USA" filmmaker Arthur Dong and BLO artistic advisor and mezzo-soprano Nina Yoshida Nelsen. BLO music director David Angus conducts. (Sept. 14-24)

"La Cenerentola" will be staged at the Emerson Cutler Majestic Theater, starring American soprano Cecelia Hall as the title character (Angelina) and South African tenor Levy Sekgapane as the Prince (Don Ramiro). The creative team will be helmed by Boston-based, Elliot Norton Award-nominated stage director Dawn M. Simmons. (Nov. 8-12)

The company then moves to the Huntington Theatre for its two winter productions. "The Anonymous Lover," a co-production with Opera Philadelphia, stars British soprano Nardus Williams as the young widow Léontine and BLO veteran Omar Najmi as Valcor, her anonymous admirer. (Feb. 16-18).

Two weeks later, there's the world premiere of a new chamber edition of Aucoin's "Eurydice," which was co-commissioned with Grand Rapids Opera. Soprano Sydney Mansacola is booked for the title role, with the composer conducting (March 1-10). The piece was originally a co-commission from LA Opera and the Metropolitan Opera, where it was performed in 2020 and 2021 respectively. Based on Ruhl's play of the same name, it retells the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice from Eurydice's point of view.

Subscription packages for three or four operas are now on sale at BLO.org. Single tickets go on sale in July.

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A.Z. Madonna can be reached at [az.madonna@globe.com](mailto:az.madonna@globe.com). Follow her on Twitter @knitandlisten.