

BOSTON LYRIC OPERA ANNOUNCES NEW OPERA WORKS BY INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED ARTISTS

MIT Media Lab's Tod Machover tackles Schoenberg in Hollywood for 2018; two-time Olivier Award-nominated composer Julian Grant and Mark Campbell (librettist for the Pulitzer Prize-winning opera Silent Night) resurrect the true story of two 19th Century serial killers this fall.

Boston, MA — January 13, 2017 – **Boston Lyric Opera's** (BLO) Stanford Calderwood General and Artistic Director **Esther Nelson** announced today two new operas that will premiere in the Company's next two seasons. *Schoenberg in Hollywood* – commissioned by BLO from the celebrated, Cambridge-based composer **Tod Machover** and librettist **Simon Robson** -- centers on influential composer Arnold Schoenberg and his late-career struggles to assimilate into the culture of early 20th century Los Angeles. Its World Premiere at BLO is scheduled for fall 2018. *The Nefarious, Immoral but Highly Profitable Enterprise of Mr. Burke & Mr. Hare* by composer **Julian Grant** and librettist **Mark Campbell** -- commissioned by New York's Music-Theatre Group with additional support from BLO and scheduled to make its World Premiere as part of BLO's fall 2017 lineup -- is based on the true story of two Irishmen who committed murders in Scotland and sold corpses for medical use.

"Commissioning and presenting new operas for Boston audiences first is one of my highest priorities for Boston Lyric Opera's next decade," Nelson says. "New works like these by Tod, Simon, Mark and Julian, ensure that opera remains a relevant, vibrant presence here. Boston is a center of innovation, and its audiences champion new voices and new works that push the boundaries. The development and performance of new work also contributes to the advancement of the industry and its artists around the world."

Selections from *Burke & Hare* will premiere at OPERA America's "New Opera Showcase" tonight in New York City.

"Music-Theatre Group has been commissioning, developing and challenging the form for almost 50 years," said Diane Wondisford, the group's Producing Director, "and I'm particularly gratified to join with Boston Lyric Opera, an adventurous and like-minded company that will premiere *Burke & Hare* and make it available to the wider world."

The World Premiere of *Burke & Hare* is planned for Boston Lyric Opera's 2017/18 Season as its "Opera Annex" selection. "Opera Annex" is the acclaimed contemporary series that focuses on more-intimate productions and audience experiences, with emphasis on new work and new interpretations of well-known pieces.

Machover Commission

Tod Machover and Simon Robson's *Schoenberg in Hollywood*, based on a scenario by Braham Murray, takes inspiration from the life of Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg during the 1930s after he fled Hitler's Europe. Settling in Los Angeles (by way of Boston), Schoenberg – whom Machover calls "the ultimate, uncompromising futurist" – considered composing film music, rediscovered his heritage, and

looked for ways to make his work more accessible to a wider public. Machover says Schoenberg's search to reconcile art with entertainment, reflection with action, and tradition with revolution is "one of the most inspiring stories of our time." He says the opera will explore the humor, heroism and pathos of Schoenberg's struggle, "providing a glimpse of what may have happened if Schoenberg had reconciled all these opposites.

"Schoenberg is a towering figure in music, a great visionary who incorporated so many things into his work that we are just beginning to understand its full impact," Machover said. "I am intrigued with the idea of what happens when a serious, complex artist – a wonderful teacher and mentor who fled Europe in the years before World War II – winds up in the center of L.A.'s film world. It's amusing to imagine his interesting, complex life there, and to uncover its relevance for future generations."

A piano workshop of selections from *Schoenberg* is planned in Boston this spring. A second workshop and complete reading follows in early 2018, with a full production in the first half of BLO's 2018/19 Season. Machover has long been associated with Boston's opera community, with his most recent opera – the "robotic" *Death and the Powers*, a 2012 Pulitzer Prize finalist – making its United States premiere with the American Repertory Theater in 2011. Machover's collaboration with Boston Lyric Opera began in 2001 with a new production of his *Resurrection*, a work commissioned and premiered two years earlier by Houston Grand Opera. "The thought of working with BLO again and developing an opera for a home audience is very exciting," Machover said.

Hailed by the media as "a musical visionary" and "America's most wired composer," Tod Machover is recognized as one of the most significant, innovative composers of his generation, celebrated for boundary-breaking music and for inventing new music technology including Hyperinstruments, which he launched in 1986. Machover studied with Elliott Carter at The Juilliard School and was the first Director of Musical Research at Pierre Boulez's IRCAM in Paris. He is the Muriel R. Cooper Professor of Music and Media at the MIT Media Lab, where he also is Director of the Opera of the Future group. Machover has been awarded numerous prizes and honors, and most recently was named *Musical America's* 2016 Composer of the Year. Machover's full bio is [here](#). Simon Robson is a respected British actor and playwright, who has written short stories and novels. His first play, *The Ghost Train Tattoo* premiered at the Royal Exchange and his book of short stories, *The Separate Heart*, was shortlisted for the Frank O'Connor Prize in 2007. Robson's first novel, *Catch*, was published in 2009. In addition to *Schoenberg in Hollywood*, Robson is working on a musical, *Memory Hotel*, with music by Alan Price.

"Tod works at the exploration horizon of music and opera," Nelson says. "I am eager to bring his entrepreneurial, experimental aesthetic back to BLO audiences. Working with Tod is always a stimulating journey; lovers of contemporary opera are eager to hear what he's doing because it represents the next step in opera's development."

Campbell and Grant's The Nefarious, Immoral, but Highly Profitable Enterprise of Mr. Burke & Mr. Hare

Composer Julian Grant and librettist Mark Campbell's theatrical, brutally funny opera is set in 1820s Edinburgh, a time when the city's famed schools of anatomy faced a severe shortage of fresh cadavers for their lectures. Sensing a money-making opportunity, William Burke, William Hare and their female accomplices worked to serve the niche market by murdering disenfranchised citizens and selling their corpses to a renowned academy, one whose time-honored principle was "the fresher, the better."

Campbell says the theme of the opera, which is narrated by five of Burke and Hare's victims, will resonate with contemporary audiences. "I was attracted to the real story of Burke and Hare because it occurs in a morally upended world – not unlike our own – where profit is pitted against science, and greed against good. Adding a good deal of mordant humor to a potentially grim tale helps engage the audience with the story. We are thrilled to work with Music-Theatre Group, Boston Lyric Opera, director David Schweizer and conductor David Angus to bring this opera to life."

Grant says he was intrigued by the challenges of making Burke and Hare sing, and felt the story lent itself to being told with deathly humor -- and a touch of vaudeville. "Five victims are central characters in our story," Grant says. "They interact with the living, adding a level of pathos and sympathy to the all-pervading villainy." Of Campbell's libretto Grant says "it is so sharp, tight and characterful, my music embraced it at once – this has been a great collaboration."

Grant is the composer of more than 18 operas including works for English National Opera, the Royal Opera and others. He won the National Opera Association of America's New Opera Prize in 1988 for *The Skin Drum* and was nominated for an Olivier Award for 1991's *Out of Season*. (Grant's full bio is available [here](#).) Campbell wrote the libretto for the opera *Silent Night*, which received the 2012 Pulitzer Prize in Music. His and composer Paul Moravec's opera *The Shining* (based on Stephen King's novel) was a critical and popular hit at Minnesota Opera in May 2016. Campbell has five operas premiering in 2017. (Campbell's full bio is available [here](#).)

"Mark and Julian's work, together and separately, are among the most innovative and popular operas being written and scored today," says Esther Nelson. "We are eager for this fascinating tale — familiar to U.K. audiences, but fresh for telling in the U.S. – to make its World Premiere in Boston. Sadly, its themes of disconnect between rich and poor, right and wrong, will likely remain relevant for years."

BLO's Commissioning History

Nelson says BLO's history of commissioning has been robust in the past five years, including Richard Beaudoin's 2011 opera *The After Image* that was created in response to – and staged in conjunction with – Viktor Ullman and Peter Kein's *The Emperor of Atlantis*. Other commissions include James MacMillan's acclaimed 2013 work *Clemency*, which was co-developed with The Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Scottish Opera and Britten Sinfonia, and received its U.S. premiere at BLO; the official reduced version of Jack Beeson's 1965 opera *Lizzie Borden*, presented in 2013; and a new book for BLO's 2016 production of *The Merry Widow*. Future commissions under consideration include a project that would coincide with the quadricentennial of the Pilgrims' landing at Plymouth Rock.

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ABOUT BOSTON LYRIC OPERA

Boston Lyric Opera is New England's leading fully-professional opera company, reaching close to 30,000 people of all ages annually. Now in its 40th Season, BLO celebrates the art of the voice through its mission of building curiosity, enthusiasm and support for opera by creating musically and theatrically compelling productions, events, and educational resources for the Boston community and beyond. Since its founding in 1976, the company has staged world premieres, U.S. premieres, co-productions and co-commissions of note with organizations such as The Royal Opera, Covent Garden and Scottish Opera, and continues to be a destination for some of the leading artists, conductors, directors and designers from around the world.

MEDIA NOTE

Additional information, photos and interviews with artistic staff re: the Boston Lyric Opera's new operas are available. Contact John Michael Kennedy at or Chelsey Saatkamp at BLO@goodmanmedia.com or by phone at 781-874-1803 (Boston area), 212-576-2700 (NYC).