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BOSTON LYRIC OPERA'S NEW PRODUCTION OF WERTHER OPENS MARCH 11

Boston, MA – February 16, 2016 – Boston Lyric Opera (BLO) unleashes Jules Massenet's melodic, romantic French opera [Werther](#) from its late 18th Century German source material, bringing it to an early-20th-Century arrondissement outside Paris as part of BLO's French-inspired season. This new production of *Werther* opens March 11 for a five-performance run at Citi Performing Arts CenterSM Shubert Theatre in Boston.

Werther marks the company debut for **Alex Richardson**, a nationally acclaimed tenor on the Metropolitan Opera roster, as the title character. Internationally acclaimed, locally based mezzo-soprano **Sandra Piques Eddy** returns to BLO as Charlotte, her debut in this role. **John Hancock** makes his BLO debut as Albert. Soprano **Rachele Gilmore**, who played Zerbinetta in BLO's 2010 production of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, returns as Sophie.

Loosely based on Goethe's revolutionary 1774 novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* – in which an obsessive poet chases a love he cannot have and cannot forget – this production imagines the story as a dying memory after the titular character mortally wounds himself. Director **Crystal Manich** and set designer/BLO Artistic Advisor **John Conklin** create a cinematic dreamscape set inspired by the poetic realism of film director Jean Renoir: a seemingly blown-apart room, filled with projections that evoke narrative locations and underscore the epistolary nature of the novel. *Werther* features lighting design by **Paul Hackenmeuller** and video design by filmmaker **Greg Emetaz**. Costume designer is **Deborah Newhall**. BLO Music Director **David Angus** conducts.

Werther is the story of a young poet tortured by unrequited love for Charlotte who, engaged to Albert in a promise made to her dying mother, rejects Werther despite her attraction to him. In this production Manich brings into high relief the couples who populate the narrative: Charlotte and Albert; Charlotte and Werther; the Magistrate and his late wife; even the drinking buddies Johann and Schmidt.

"Few composers excel in their musical depiction of passionate love as much as Massenet," says **Esther Nelson**, BLO's Stanford Calderwood General & Artistic Director. "This opera features one of his most unforgettable, tender and vivid heroines. BLO's surreal, cinematic production creates a powerful, emotional setting."

THE CAST

Alex Richardson, who steps into the role for the previously announced Joseph Kaiser*, makes his BLO debut as the tortured poet Werther. His additional recent career highlights include Václav Kadrnáš in *Káťa Kabanová* at Spoleto Festival USA, Szymanowski's King Roger with Charles Dutoit and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and responsibilities for the role of Alwa in a new production of Alban Berg's *Lulu* at The Metropolitan Opera. Alex's performance as Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby* at the

Tanglewood 75th Anniversary celebration received critical acclaim, and he has been a featured soloist there numerous times. He appeared as a tenor soloist in the Verdi Requiem at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, and in a concert of opera highlights with the Carolina Philharmonic, as well as in Stravinsky's Les Noces at the Colorado College Summer Music Festival.

Mezzo-soprano and Dedham, Mass. resident **Sandra Piques Eddy** plays Charlotte, the object of Werther's affections. Eddy last was seen at BLO as Varvara in the 2015 production of Kátya Kabanová; she also appeared as Dorabella in *Così Fan Tutte* and Idamante in *Idomeneo*. She has appeared at nearly all of the largest opera companies in the U.S. and enjoys an artistic collaboration with Tim Albery at Opera North UK, where she recently sang the lead roles in *Carmen* and *The Coronation of Poppea*. Eddy is on the Metropolitan Opera's roster this year; previously she appeared there as Fiona in the premiere production of Nico Muhly's *Two Boys*, as Olga in *The Merry Widow*, and as Rosette in *Manon*.

Making his BLO debut as Albert is baritone **John Hancock**. A gifted interpreter of contemporary opera, Hancock has created leading roles in several world premieres, notably Lowell Liebermann's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* at Opéra de Monte Carlo, Stephen Paulus' *Heloise and Abelard* as an alumni artist at the Juilliard School, and *Central Park*, a trilogy of American operas at Glimmerglass Opera and New York City Opera (which also was broadcast on PBS' "Great Performances"). The parent of an Emerson College student, Hancock appears regularly with the Metropolitan Opera.

Rachele Gilmore, who sings the role of Sophie, was seen here last in BLO's *Ariadne auf Naxos* in 2010. She recently appeared as Blondchen in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* at Théâtre Champs-Élysées, as Alice in Unsuk Chin's *Alice in Wonderland* at Los Angeles Philharmonic and for BBC Symphony Orchestra, and as Gilda in *Rigoletto* at Opera Omaha.

The Werther cast also includes tenor **Jon Jurgens**, who sang Tristan in BLO's highly praised 2014 Opera Annex production of *The Love Potion*; baritone **David McFerrin**, a BLO regular last seen in 2015's acclaimed *In the Penal Colony*; and baritone **James Demler**, who performed in BLO's *Kátya Kabanová*.

* Under advisement of his team of physicians, Joseph Kaiser withdrew earlier this month from Boston Lyric Opera's presentation of *Werther*. The tenor is suffering from compromising orthopedic issues in his upper back that require a surgical procedure, and a recuperation of brief immobility that prohibited his ability to perform in this production.

THE CREATIVE TEAM

David Angus (Conductor and Music Director) – David Angus' career has taken him from his home near London to orchestras and opera companies all over the world. Appointed as BLO's music director in 2010, he now conducts the majority of the Company's operas each Season. He also regularly conducts the London Philharmonic Orchestra, is honorary conductor of the Symphony Orchestra of Flanders, and was previously the music director of Glimmerglass Opera, in addition to regularly working with some of the most celebrated musical organizations around the globe.

Crystal Manich (Stage Director) – A co-artistic director of Opera Omnia in New York, Crystal Manich is a renowned international stage director. She is founder and artistic director of Wanderlust, a group that performs musical dramas in public spaces. Manich has directed musicals and operas at various companies in the United States and abroad including Boston Lyric Opera's 2014 production of *I Puritani*, Pittsburgh Opera's 2016 premiere of *Little Women*, *Werther* at Buenos Aires Lirica (2015), and many more. She has served as Assistant Artistic Director on Cirque du Soleil's *Quidam* 2009-2010 South American tour. She is a member of the National Michael Chekhov Association.

John Conklin (Set Designer) – John Conklin has designed sets on and off Broadway, at the Kennedy Center, and for many opera companies throughout the U.S. and across the globe including the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago and Seattle Opera. As BLO's Artistic Advisor, Conklin works to develop new supplemental performances, lecture series and community events that enrich audiences' operatic experiences and strengthen the presence of opera in the community.

Deborah Newhall (Costume Designer) – Returning to BLO for *Werther*, Deborah Newhall's costumes have been seen on the stages of Merrimack Repertory Theatre (*The Outgoing Tide*), 59E59 Theater's *Love Song* as well as on screen for David O. Russell's *American Hustle*, PBS' *American Experience: The Abolitionists*, and Josh Radnor's *Liberal Arts*. She previously designed costumes for BLO's productions of *Regina*, *Lost in the Stars*, *Wuthering Heights* and *La Bohème* in the early 1990s.

Paul Hackenmeuller (Lighting Designer) – Lighting designer Paul Hackenmeuller returns to Boston Lyric Opera having previously worked on several BLO productions, including *I Puritani* and *Tosca*. His broad range of work includes lighting musical artists such as Katy Perry, Beyonce, Bruno Mars, Tony Bennett, and Justin Timberlake as well as consulting to corporate clients including Target, Carlson Companies, and Wells Fargo. In addition to work with many regional theaters and over 10 Broadway productions, Mr. Hackenmueller's recent and upcoming opera work includes work with The Dallas Opera, Rome Opera, Bucharest National, Minnesota Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, Opera Colorado, and Gotham Chamber Opera.

Greg Emetaz (Video Designer) – Greg Emetaz's work as a video designer for the stage includes *Dolores Claiborne* (World Premiere) at San Francisco Opera, *Champion* (World Premiere), *Bel Canto* at Lyric Opera of Chicago, *Unsub Chin's Alice in Wonderland* (American Premiere), *The Death of Klinghoffer* and *The Golden Ticket* (World Premiere) at Opera Theater of Saint Louis, *Ajax* at American Repertory Theater, and Wallace Shawn's *The Music Teacher*. He created the behind-the-scenes documentary of Julie Taymor's feature film *The Tempest*, as well as promotional documentaries for the Broadway musical *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark* and numerous productions at New York City Opera and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.

Jason Allen (Wig and Makeup Designer) – Jason Allen has been resident designer with Boston Lyric Opera since 2003. Recent career highlights include *The Colored Museum* (at Huntington Theatre Company), *The Manchurian Candidate* (Minnesota Opera), *Sense & Sensibility* (Dallas Theatre Center), *La Fanciulla del West* (Minnesota Opera), *Tosca* (Mill City Summer Opera), *Swan Lake* (Boston Ballet) and *Awake and Sing!* (Huntington Theatre Company). His upcoming productions include: *The Marriage of Figaro* (The Princeton Festival), *Carmen* (Minnesota Opera) and *Kiss Me, Kate* (Hartford Stage).

Composed by Jules Massenet, *Werther* features a libretto by Édouard Blau, Paul Milliet and Georges Hartmann.

PERFORMANCE AND TICKET INFORMATION

Boston Lyric Opera's *Werther* runs March 11, 13, 16, 18, and 20 at the Citi Performing Arts CenterSM Shubert Theatre, 265 Tremont Street, Boston, with evening performances at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday matinees at 3:00 p.m.

Tickets are \$25-\$175 and are available online at blo.org/buy-tickets, by phone at 866.348.9738 (TTY 888.889.8587), and in person at the Citi Performing Arts CenterSM Box Office at 270 Tremont Street, Boston. The Box Office is open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 12 noon to 6 p.m. and at the Shubert

Theatre one hour before curtain. Group and student tickets are available through BLO Audience Services at 617.542.6772 or boxoffice@blo.org. Learn more at blo.org.

RELATED ACTIVITIES

Boston Lyric Opera is planning a number of public events tied to *Werther*. Events are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted and more details can be found at blo.org.

Feb. 21, 2 p.m. [Signature Series: Paris, the Surreal City -- Dreams, Manifestos and Music](#) – Take a journey back to Paris at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Through eccentric and erotic words, music and images, discover a civilization still recovering from the trauma of the Great War and seeking freedom and release in the uncharted depths of the unconscious imagination. See another view of Paris in Boston Lyric Opera's exploration of the City of Light in the 20th century, inspired by the special exhibition, Visiting Masterpieces: Pairing Picassos, and two spring operas now set by BLO in the iconic city, *Werther* and *The Merry Widow*. Tickets (16 members/\$20 non-members) are available at the [Museum of Fine Arts Boston website](#).

Feb. 25, 6 p.m. [Opera Night at the Boston Public Library -- The Bittersweet Romance of Werther: An Evening with David Angus](#) - Boston Lyric Opera Music Director and Conductor David Angus explores the lush and lyrical *Werther*, an opera beloved for its emotionally wrenching and melodically rich score. David Angus provides listening insights and context, illuminated by live selections from the opera by the stars of *Werther*. The free event takes place in the Abbey Room of the BPL Central Branch, Copley Square.

March 7, 6 p.m. [A Taste of Werther: Opera, Beer, Pretzels & Cheese](#) – Boston Lyric Opera visits the BCAE for a lively armchair tour through *Werther*. Listen to selected recordings of the world's most renowned singers performing highlights from this beautiful work, while Adam Centamore, the BCAE's culinary guru (and resident opera buff), punctuates this musical adventure with delicious German beers and cheeses inspired by the opera's twists and turns. Tickets (\$35) are available at www.bcae.org.

[Pre-Performance Talks](#) are given one hour before each performance and are free to all ticket holders. Explore the production's history and how music and design interact to create dynamic performances, while hearing about performance highlights and unique BLO touches to watch for.

#AddYourLove Promotion. Audiences can be part of *Werther* by writing some of the love letters for use in conjunction with the production – onstage, in program materials, on social media and more. Whether lovelorn, love-sick, or in a long-term relationship, participants are encouraged to write letters to their loved ones and submit them at www.blo.org/addyourlove. Anonymous snippets may also be used in the *Werther* playbill and on BLO social media with the hashtag #AddYourLove. Details available at www.blo.org/addyourlove.

Werther is the penultimate performance of the BLO 15/16 season. From **April 29-May 8**, BLO presents a new production of Franz Lehár's classic operetta **The Merry Widow**.

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ABOUT BOSTON LYRIC OPERA

BLO is New England's leading fully-professional opera company, reaching close to 30,000 people of all ages annually. Now in its 39th 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: Photos of featured performers and interviews with artistic staff about *Werther* are available. For more information contact Chelsey Saatkamp, Goodman Media for BLO at BLO@goodmanmedia.com, 212-576-2700 (New York direct), or John Michael Kennedy, Goodman Media/Boston at jmkennedy@goodmanmedia.com or 781-874-1803.