

**BOSTON LYRIC OPERA PRESENTS IMMERSIVE NEW PRODUCTION OF
THE LOVE POTION, MARTIN'S RETELLING OF TRISTAN & ISOLT**
Company's 6th Opera Annex opens November 19 at Temple Ohabei Shalom in Brookline

Boston, MA—Boston Lyric Opera (BLO) presents the Boston premiere of a fully staged version of *The Love Potion*, composer Frank Martin's retelling of the legendary story of Tristan and Isolt. It will be sung in a new English translation by musicologist Hugh Macdonald that was commissioned by BLO.

This Season's Opera Annex production will be presented as an immersive, intimate experience at Temple Ohabei Shalom in Brookline November 19, 20, 22 and 23; the performance on the 23rd is, in fact, already sold out. BLO's performance dates were scheduled to honor the 40th anniversary of Swiss composer Frank Martin's death, which occurred on November 21, 1974 in Naarden, Holland.

In this gripping work, we hear the medieval tale of the fateful love potion that binds the knight Tristan to Isolt, the princess torn between duty and love. Praised for her luminous voice, Boston favorite soprano Chelsea Basler returns in the unforgettable role in a new production directed by David Schweizer (*The Emperor of Atlantis*).

Audience members will have a rare opportunity to see this beautiful and unusual work in a powerful staging. The opera is increasingly popular in Europe but is rarely performed in the U.S., once notably in Boston in 1990 by the John Oliver Chorale. Former *Boston Globe* critic Richard Dyer wrote at that time that, "anyone who chooses to enter into Martin's world will discover music of refinement and depth of feeling."

"I have included *The Love Potion* because it is both beautiful music and fascinating theater," notes Esther Nelson, BLO's General & Artistic Director. "Frank Martin's opera, originally called *Le Vin Herbé*, is a truly timeless work, which is modern and old at the same time. It is music that is unfamiliar but quickly gets under your skin. It's not really an opera, nor an oratorio. It's an intimate chamber work but with a powerful sound. The soloists act and sing their roles while also blending in like a Greek chorus. It tells the story of ideal love that is pure but it is also deadly."

Conductor David Angus observes, "This is the opposite extreme from Wagner's extravagantly rich score—just 12 singers and eight instrumentalists—but it is still very powerful and atmospheric, and very much faster moving! In theory it is complex and atonal, but in reality it is much closer to the string quartets of Debussy and Ravel in instrumental sound, with beautiful songs for soloists or chorus and piano superimposed. The music has great beauty and drama on an intimate scale in which every detail is very telling."

THE LEGEND

The Tristan and Isolt legend has pervaded various cultures for centuries. The medieval tale of the ill-fated lovers, the Cornish Tristan and his Irish princess Isolt has been retold and interpreted many times in literature, theater, film, ballet, music, and opera.

All of the Tristan tales share the core story of the young knight Tristan being sent to Ireland to bring back the fair Isolt as bride for his uncle, King Mark. On their return journey to Cornwall they accidentally drink a love potion, which inexorably links their fate. All their efforts to fight against the magic of the potion are in vain and they can ultimately only find redemption in death. Of course the same ideals of conflicted

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absolute love are found in the Arthurian legends. In one of those we also find Tristan as a knight of the Round Table.

BLO'S NEW PRODUCTION

"I had the great pleasure to meet with Madame Martin, the composer's 99 year-old widow in Naarden, Holland, last spring," says Nelson. "She emphasized how important it was to her husband that the text be understood in the native tongue of the audience. Therefore, BLO has commissioned its own English translation by pre-eminent musicologist, General Editor of the New Berlioz edition and renowned translator of opera, Hugh Macdonald, which will premiere with our production." The text will also be projected during performances.

Stage director David Schweizer sees absolute love as a deeply human yearning. Abandoning ourselves to such a love is at the same time freeing and terrifying. BLO's staging will transport you to the opera's medieval roots while keeping the basic emotions and some of the story telling very relevant to today. The visual field, the lighting and costumes will blend the past and present times in the same unique way that Martin's music is universal.

Set Designer Jim Noone is embracing the existing architecture of Temple Ohabei Shalom and "hopefully creating a design that feels as though it belongs in the venue or is part of the venue...not a foreign object," says Bradley Vernatter, BLO's Director of Production.

THE LOCATION

The design of the sanctuary of the Temple Ohabei Shalom, one of America's great and beautiful historical synagogues, represents a yearning for a higher state, which BLO's creative team incorporates as part of the mystical setting in their installation design. The tale is dark and somber, but Martin's music opens the door to let in hope and light. That is an important aspect for the creative team. "The audience will literally see and feel the light of love," says Nelson. "I believe that *The Love Potion*, a work full of contrasts yet united in beautiful harmony, will blossom better in a non-traditional performance space."

BLO's production is the first event of this scale and scope in the venue that was built in 1928, although not the first secular event. The synagogue is proud of its presence in the community and sees hosting this production as an expansion of its civic footprint. The congregation has a strong tradition in music through its services and school. "There is a term in Hebrew, '*Hiddur Mitzvah*,' which means to enhance the doing of commandments with aesthetic beauty," says Cantor Randall Schloss. "As a synagogue whose mission is to touch and sustain lives, we are excited that our collaboration with Boston Lyric Opera will benefit not just our synagogue community, but the broader Brookline and Boston communities that both organizations serve."

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The cast includes soprano Chelsea Basler as Isolt the Fair and baritone David McFerrin as King Mark. Both have frequently performed with BLO, along with tenor Omar Najmi, who sings Tristan's friend Kahedin, and soprano Mara Bonde, who appears as Yvon. Company principal role debuts include tenor Jon Jurgens as Tristan and Rachel Hauge as Isolt of the White Hands, Tristan's ill-fated wife later in the story. Other BLO Emerging Artist alums include David Cushing, and Michelle Trainor. Trainor and McFerrin star in BLO's just-released commercial CD of *Clemency*, the Company's 2013 Opera Annex selection.

Jurgens, a BLO Emerging Artist, was hailed by *Opera News* as, "...a surprise discovery, an affable, open-throated Italianate tenor with a full, easy top and real lyric bloom..." He made his BLO debut as Gastone in the recent *La Traviata* while covering the role of Alfredo.

Basler, praised by *Opera Today* as "simply superb," returns to the BLO stage after appearing as Flora in *La Traviata*. In Spring 2015, she will reappear as Glasha in *Kátya Kabanová* and Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*. Basler joined the Company in the 2013/14 Season as Emerging Artist in Residence, appearing in all four BLO productions. She appeared as Papagena in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and sang the role of Margret

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in *Lizzie Borden* at Tanglewood. Additional BLO appearances included Countess Ceprano in *Rigoletto* and Enrichetta in *I Puritani*. Basler makes her New York recital debut at the National Opera Center in New York in the beginning of December.

Music Director David Angus will take the podium for all but the performance on the 22nd, which will be conducted by Ryan Turner, Artistic Director of Emmanuel Music.

Stage Director David Schweizer returns after receiving high praise for his work with BLO's 2011 *The Emperor of Atlantis, or Death Quits*. Set Designer Jim Noone and Costume Designer Nancy Leary work together as faculty at Boston University. Leary has designed for numerous BLO productions, as has Lighting Designer Robert Wierzel.