BOSTON LYRIC OPERA

Q&A About BLO's New General & Artistic Director Esther Nelson

- About the new General & Artistic Director
- Impact on the Company
- About Janice Mancini Del Sesto
- **Media inquiries should be directed to Mia Howard at mhoward@blo.org or 617.542.4912 x240**

ABOUT THE NEW GENERAL & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Why has a new General & Artistic Director been hired?
In November 2007, General Director Janice Mancini Del Sesto announced her decision not to renew her current contract, which was set to expire in 2009, at which time she would have devoted 17 years of service to the Company.

When will Ms. Nelson start?
Ms. Nelson will officially start September 2, 2008.

Does Ms. Nelson have a mandate to change the mission of BLO?
The mission of BLO is to produce artistically excellent productions of a diverse repertoire that entertain and inspire audiences, to feature the most exciting young talent in the world of opera and to engage and educate the community of all ages about opera. The Board of BLO is committed to this mission and expects no change.

Does Ms. Nelson have a mandate to change the direction of BLO?
The Search Committee and the Board agree that BLO is in a very strong position thanks to the dedicated efforts of Ms. Del Sesto and all the BLO staff and supporters over the years. Ms. Nelson will work with the staff to build the organization's capacity in order to increase the quality, quantity and diversity of opera in Boston.

What excited the search committee about Ms. Nelson?
The search committee was excited about Ms. Nelson's three decades of successes among many opera and arts organizations across the country. Her impressive leadership of Glimmerglass Opera followed by her most recent work as a management consultant to a variety of arts companies demonstrates an intensive knowledge of and commitment to the arts community, as well as a deep familiarity with what is involved in and required for being a successful CEO of an opera company. The committee also valued her artistic background and involvement with the local community beyond the arts world.

What attracted Ms. Nelson to BLO?
Ms. Nelson was attracted by Boston's vibrant arts community, and the opportunity to build on Ms. Del Sesto's admirable leadership and Maestro Lord's artistic vision and excellence. She was also impressed by BLO's committed and generous Board of Directors and Overseers, dedicated staff, and supporters.

What did the applicant pool look like?
There was significant interest in the position and the pool included some exceptionally strong candidates.

What are the priorities of the new GD?
Ms. Nelson considers opera an important and exciting form of expression because it showcases multiple talents of music and theater, from singers and musicians, to stage, costume, and lighting designers. The artistic quality is her priority. However, she notes there will not any success without continuing Ms. Del Sesto's legacy of financial stability and growth, her commitment to young artists and new audience development, and her exploration of new community engagement opportunities. "A balanced budget is always a necessity!" says Ms. Nelson. "It's like a designer dress that has to fit the person! The most beautiful outfit on the wrong person won't work. The most beautiful production that we can't pay for, won't work!"

What is Ms. Nelson's opinion on new works, audience development, staff development?
"Opera's classic favorites continue to be popular because they are as relevant and moving today as they were during the time that they were written," Ms. Nelson notes. "Opera is a viable art form today as well, and I hope that the Boston audience will share in the excitement of developing and presenting new or rarely performed works that are meaningful to today's world, and to all generations.

It is crucial to listen to your audience, since they will let you know if they like the shows or not. Ideally, you also have an audience willing to trust you with choices that are unfamiliar.

Furthermore, success in the not-for-profit performing arts can only be achieved by a dedicated team of staff who also love opera, and who are not afraid of long, and irregular hours. It is vital that there be a respectful and harmonious working environment. All people who are engaged in the performing arts, whether they are artists, overseers, volunteers, donors, staff or audience, want to be part of an exciting organization."

What is Ms. Nelson's perspective on BLO's education program going forward?
Ms. Nelson has a history of strengthening education and engagement in her previous organizations. She feels strongly that educational programs deserve the same dedication to artistic excellence as any other program, which is increasingly challenging in an atmosphere of low education funding from the public sector. She is impressed by the current BLO offerings, and hopes to continue with good quality programming.

What is Ms. Nelson's background in opera and the performing arts professionally and personally?
Ms. Nelson's experience in opera and the performing arts spans three decades. Prior to her recent position as a Management Consultant to artistic associations in New York, Virginia, Tennessee, Maine and Germany, Ms. Nelson spent six years as the General Director/CEO of Glimmerglass Opera, an internationally renowned opera festival in Cooperstown, NY. During that time, the company expanded its artistic growth, dramatically increased ticket revenue, fundraising, special events and education outreach, and nearly doubled its annual budget. Shortly before Ms. Nelson's departure in 2002, Glimmerglass enjoyed an accumulated surplus and an Endowment growth. Her leadership of the prestigious company earned her a professional citation from the Governor of New York.

Before joining Glimmerglass, Ms. Nelson was the General Director/CEO at Nevada Opera Association; the Director for Virginia Opera Association in Richmond; the General Director at Triangle Opera Theater in North Carolina; and the Director of Public Relations, Marketing and Development for New Orleans Opera Association, where she was also responsible for artistic administration. Ms. Nelson first entered the New Orleans community in the late 1970s as the Assistant Art Director and Set Designer for the city's PBS station, WYES, before becoming the Art Director for Fitzgerald Advertising, Inc. Her artistic leadership at these two organizations garnered several national advertising and design awards.

Ms. Nelson has been an On-site Evaluator for the National Endowment for the Arts, an outside consultant for OPERA America, an evaluation panelist for the New York State Council of the Arts, and a frequent panelist and speaker. Present professional and civic activities include serving on the Boards of several financial, direct services, health care, arts and cultural agencies in the U.S. as well as in Europe. She and her husband Bernd Ulken, a retired Delta Airline Captain, have two children, Dieter and Clara Ulken. Ms.Nelson's other interests include piano music, painting, writing, medieval history and literature, bicycling and running, and she holds a license as a private pilot. She also is an active member in her family organization dedicated to the preservation of their ancestral castle in her hometown of Sulzfeld/Baden, Germany.

How can people get to meet Ms. Nelson?
BLO will host a series of "meet and greet" events to offer groups a chance to meet Ms. Nelson soon after she starts. She will also continue Ms. Del Sesto's practice of being visible and accessible at BLO events and performances. Requests for private introductions can be made through the Executive Assistant to the General Director, Blair Lesser, at blesser@blo.org or 617.542.4912 x224. Press requests for interviews can be made through the Marketing & Communications Manager, Mia Howard, at mhoward@blo.org or 617.542.4912 x240.

IMPACT ON THE COMPANY

Is the Company's future season planning in tact?
Opera companies must plan well in advance to secure singers and productions. BLO's 2009-2010 Season is already in the planning stages. Ms. Nelson will complete the planning for 2009-2010 and subsequent seasons. As it always has, the Company continues to audition artists and attend competitions and performances around the country to indentify and contract the most exciting young talent in the world of opera. It has worked for years with the opera world's best young artist programs and artists managers to identify, recruit, and debut the best of young talent on our stage.

When will the search for the new Music Director begin? Will Ms. Nelson be involved?
The search will begin once Ms. Nelson is settled in and knows the organization and its needs. She will be intimately involved in the selection of the new Music Director.

Will BLO continue to perform at the Shubert?
Yes, our existing contract with the Citi Performing Arts Center[SM] remains intact for our mainstage productions. Our opera production for school children and families presents in venues throughout New England.

ABOUT JANICE MANCINI DEL SESTO

Why did Ms. Del Sesto leave her position of General Director of BLO?

During the search for new artistic leadership to replace Music Director Stephen Lord last year, Ms. Del Sesto concluded that Boston Lyric Opera would be better served by putting a new administrative and artistic team in place going forward. By the time her current contract ends in June 2009, she will have been at BLO for 17 years, and she believed it was an appropriate time for a change for BLO and for her. She gave her notice well in advance in order to provide ample time for the search and an adequate transition period.

What is Ms. Del Sesto going to do when she leaves BLO?

During her tenure, BLO grew from 64th in size to 26th out of 116 U.S. opera companies and is the largest professional opera company in New England. For now, Ms. Del Sesto's primary concern is ensuring that the transition to the new leadership is as seamless as possible so that BLO continues to thrive.

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Boston Lyric Opera (BLO) is New England's favorite opera company. Founded in 1976, BLO is recognized for its artistically excellent productions of a diverse repertoire that entertain and inspire audiences and feature emerging operatic talent. BLO produces three mainstage productions at the Citi Performing Arts Center℠ Shubert Theatre in Boston and a production of a fully staged, one-hour English version of a popular opera for school children and families throughout New England. BLO's programs are funded, in part, by a grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. www.blo.org