

# BOSTONLYRICOPERA

Senior Major Gift Officer  
*Boston, MA*

Boston Lyric Opera (BLO) seeks an entrepreneurial, creative, and energetic Senior Major Gift Officer (Sr. MGO) to join the Company at a time of vibrant renewal and ambition. The Sr. MGO will build individual donor relationships resulting in deeper engagement, warm networks, and increased philanthropic giving from BLO's constellation of supporters in New England and beyond. From audience members, arts patrons, working artists, and neighbors to deeply engaged donors and volunteers, the Sr. MGO will have ample runway for growth as the Company prepares for its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the 2026/27 Season and other ambitious strategic initiatives. BLO has earned a national reputation for the quality of its artistry and in its 49<sup>th</sup> year is an essential part of the city's artistic life.

Boston Lyric Opera is dedicated to creating compelling operatic experiences throughout the greater Boston area that welcome new audiences, break new ground, and enrich community life. BLO offers an evocative, intersectional approach to storytelling, music, and design that welcomes fresh perspectives and celebrates the rich history of opera while reenvisioning the art form in ways that inspire new connections, making opera accessible and relevant to today's culture. Carefully cultivated community connection is a fundamental part of BLO's DNA: for decades the Company has featured leading and emergent artists, conductors, directors, and designers from around the world for its mainstage season, while working with nonprofit, educational, and community partners across New England to offer hundreds of free and affordable all-ages and youth-focused programs in classrooms, public venues like BLO Street Stage, and digital productions. Now, BLO is expanding its reach by offering a window into the creative process with rehearsals and events at its new headquarters and community studios. This inclusive approach is one that invites and embraces all audiences, and BLO is seeking a seasoned fundraiser who can harness the Company's innovative spirit and expanding audience to garner philanthropic support. Individual giving is a vital contributor to the Company's success, and this is an opportunity for an enterprising development professional to join an organization on the move.

The Philanthropy team, led by Chief Philanthropy Advisor Ishan Johnson, works with Stanford Calderwood General Director & Chief Executive Officer Bradley Vernatter to secure major, planned, and principal gifts, partnering closely with the board and BLO's artistic leaders. The Sr. MGO will use creative and sophisticated identification, cultivation, and solicitation methods to close gifts of \$25,000 and above, with a focus on the engagement of new high-net-worth prospects. The successful candidate will have the opportunity to travel to discover and engage donors for BLO's upcoming campaign. The Sr. MGO will be knowledgeable about the nuances of fundraising for the arts and the budget model for arts nonprofits.

The successful candidate will bring at least seven years of directly applicable experience, proficiency in a resource-lean organization, and experience working with people of diverse cultural backgrounds. The Sr. MGO should have a demonstrated ability to cultivate productive, collaborative relationships with leaders and staff across an organization to ensure a coordinated and thoughtful approach to all activities meant to engage prospects and donors, helping to inspire higher levels of philanthropic support. The Sr. MGO will ensure an exceptional donor giving journey—from identification and solicitation to gift closure and stewardship. The Sr. MGO will possess a collaborative and self-authorizing style, strong work ethic, and enthusiasm for the mission and goals of Boston Lyric Opera. A bachelor's degree is required.

## Boston Lyric Opera

Since its founding in 1976, Boston Lyric Opera has produced world and U.S. premieres, Pulitzer Prize-winning operas, and notable commissions and coproductions, ranging from live stage shows to films streamed worldwide. Each year, BLO presents over 150 public performances, including mainstage programming and free community and education offerings, welcoming over 25,000 audience members. These programs are enhanced by partnerships with local cultural organizations including the Boston Public Library, Boston Public Schools, and many more.

BLO launched a new [five-year strategic plan](#) in 2022, prioritizing four strategic pillars: Programming, Community, Space, and Leadership, along with a renewed commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility. BLO employs over 800 artists and creative professionals annually—vocalists, instrumentalists, artisans, stagehands, costumers, scenic designers, administrators, and beyond. The Company is proud to play a significant and meaningful role in Boston’s vibrant arts community.

### Bradley Vernatter

#### Stanford Calderwood General Director & Chief Executive Officer

Bradley Vernatter is the Stanford Calderwood General Director & Chief Executive Officer of Boston Lyric Opera, the Company’s top leadership role. Now in his 12<sup>th</sup> year with BLO and leading the company since 2021, he has guided BLO’s recovery from the pandemic, driven the funding campaign for and the move into its Opera + Community Studios, and shaped the organization’s strategic plan, which will lead BLO into its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary season in 2026/27. Throughout his career, Vernatter has produced a range of operas, multidisciplinary performances, and media productions.

In 2020, he was recognized by *Boston Business Journal* as one of Boston’s “40 Under 40” rising young leaders. He was a member of the YW Boston LeadBoston 2022 cohort and served on the board of advisors at Artists For Humanity, a nonprofit that empowers teens through employment in the arts. Additionally, he contributes to social entrepreneurship projects addressing access to basic services.

Previously, Vernatter served as BLO’s Acting General and Artistic Director, after having served as the Company’s Chief Operating Officer. Before BLO, he was Director of Operations for Opera Omaha and Associate Producer for the Company’s ONE Festival. He held artistic and management positions with Wexford Festival Opera, Chicago Opera Theater, the Castleton (VA) Festival, and the Miller Theatre at Columbia University.

Vernatter holds a Master of Business Administration from the IE-Brown MBA program (Madrid/Providence, R.I.), a Bachelor of Arts from Otterbein College, and a certificate in professional fundraising from Boston University. He is an alumnus of the OPERA America Leadership Intensive, through which he has participated in the Civic Action Group and as a grant reviewer.

### Nina Yoshida Nelsen

#### Artistic Director

Nina Yoshida Nelsen made her Boston Lyric Opera performing debut in 2021 as Mamma Lucia, *Cavalleria Rusticana*. She was featured as a singer and storyteller in the filmed documentary-concert *B.*, which marked an artistic culmination of BLO’s “The Butterfly Process.” She joined the company as an Artistic Advisor in 2021,

participating in artistic discussions and decisions, company auditions, and more. Most recently, she served as dramaturg for BLO's widely acclaimed 2023 production of *Madama Butterfly*.

Nelsen has performed traditional and contemporary operatic roles throughout North America and Europe, including performances with Washington National Opera, Lincoln Center, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, and Avery Fisher Hall. Nelsen recently sang Melissa, *Alcina*, Seattle Opera and the title role of *Carmen*, Indianapolis Opera. She debuted last season with Opera Carolina as Suzuki, *Madama Butterfly*; made a role debut as Marcellina, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Utah Opera; and reprised Mother Chen, *An American Soldier*, Perelman Performing Arts Center.

As Co-Founder and Board President of Asian Opera Alliance, Nelsen has worked to uplift Asian artists, and to advocate for greater representation within the industry. She was recently featured in TIME Magazine and was the subject of an NHK World documentary centered on Jack Perla and Jessica Murphy Moo's opera *An American Dream* and Nelsen's origination of the role of Hiroko Kobayashi at Seattle Opera.

A Boston University alumna, Nelsen received an undergraduate degree in violin and psychology in 2001 and a Master's degree in voice in 2003. She also studied at Philadelphia's prestigious Academy of Vocal Arts, where she received an Artist Diploma in 2009.

## Ishan Johnson

### Chief Philanthropy Advisor

Ishan Johnson is the Chief Philanthropy Advisor for Boston Lyric Opera and joined the team in 2023. Prior to BLO, he served as Associate Director, Philanthropy for the Art Institute of Chicago and previously was Associate Director of Development for Chicago Opera Theater.

A respected fundraiser, speaker, and moderator, Ishan has been featured on panels with the National Alliance for Musical Theatre, AFP Chicago, AFP Massachusetts, Boston University, the Philanthropy Club of Chicago, University Club of Chicago, Easterseals, Chicago Opera Theater, Grantmakers Association of America, and the Arts Club of Chicago. Most recently, he served as a mentor in the inaugural Opera Leaders of Color Mentorship Program with Opera America.

Ishan holds a Vocal Performance degree from Boston University and maintained a professional career as an opera singer for more than a decade. A graduate of the AFP Chicago Fellows program, Ishan proudly served on the chapter's Board of Directors as Vice President of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access. Ishan is an alumnus of the Coca-Cola Scholars Program, a Member of the Arts Club of Chicago, and serves on the Boston University Alumni Council. He obtained his CFRE (Certified Fund Raising Executive) certification in 2022.

## Philanthropy at BLO

BLO's Philanthropy team comprises a growing staff responsible for annual, major, principal, and planned gifts, prospect research, membership and donor pipeline development, stewardship, and management of the Company's committed and generous volunteers. Together with the CEO, Artistic Director, board chair, and board president, the Philanthropy team achieves ambitious contributed revenue goals of \$9 million+ that enable the Company to achieve its vision and mission.

The Philanthropy team works in close partnership with External Affairs, a team responsible for CRM administration, institutional giving, marketing, subscriptions and ticketing, and audience development.

The Company is in the closing stages of its \$10.5 million capital campaign to expand and renovate its studios and administrative center in the [Opera + Community Studios](#). Planning is well underway for a significant comprehensive campaign in celebration of BLO's upcoming 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

## Senior Major Gift Officer

The Senior Major Gift Officer is a frontline fundraiser charged with advancing and executing BLO's program for philanthropic gifts of \$25,000 or more from individuals and families, including family foundations and estates. Central to the Senior Major Gift Officer's role is evaluating various gift opportunities and giving vehicles and recommending the most suitable in line with the prospect's philanthropic goals, interests, and financial situation and in keeping with BLO's priorities. While general operating support is essential for BLO's art form, the organization understands the importance of investing in a variety of funding vehicles including the creation of an organization-wide planned giving program. The Sr. MGO is encouraged to explore all avenues and play a central role in collaborating with the Board and staff leaders of the Company.

The Sr. MGO is responsible for increasing revenue, retention, and acquisition of individual donors through consistent identification, engagement, timely solicitation, and stewardship. While rigorously managing their own portfolio of major donors and prospects, the Sr. MGO achieves annual fundraising goals and helps to ensure the success of long-term capital and deferred goals. The Sr. MGO reports to the Chief Philanthropy Advisor, who manages the Philanthropy department's achievement of annual revenue targets and stewards the CEO and Board of Directors in their fundraising and governance responsibilities.

## Essential Duties

- Identify, cultivate, and solicit BLO donors and prospects for gifts of \$25,000 or more. Meet assigned activity and revenue goals.
- Cultivate and solicit donors for multi-year commitments, creating sustainability for the organization in future years.
- Develop and maintain a successful major gift solicitation program, including a strategic operating plan, identifying priorities and prospects, assigning prospect ratings, and recommending goals for future support. Identify and leverage Board and other network links to prospects and donors.
- Devise and implement cultivation and solicitation strategies. Initiate and maintain contact with current, past, and prospective donors, promoting positive donor relations efficiently. Identify disaffected or disinterested donors and devise strategies to encourage/redirect their interests as appropriate. Engage volunteers proactively as needed.
- Determine and execute events and programs in support of philanthropy activities, assessing the success of such events and programs and recommending changes.
- Coordinate with internal constituents on BLO needs, cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship strategies with regard to potential donors. Keep abreast of BLO activities and disseminate BLO information to donors, prospective donors, volunteers, and team members as appropriate.

- Stay abreast of economic trends in the national and Boston business sectors for their potential impact on major gift fundraising results.
- Review campaign analyses, generate goals, forecasts, and reports, and implement strategies in accordance with an annual business plan.
- Contribute to strategic direction and creative solutions for overall fundraising and donor care.
- Collaborate with the Philanthropy Researcher to maintain research on prospects and donors.

## Experience and Qualifications

The ideal candidate will bring many of the following professional qualities and experiences:

- Bachelor's Degree and a minimum of seven years of fundraising experience in moves management systems, or equivalent combination of education and experience
- Demonstrated ability to personally and consistently close five-figure or larger philanthropic gifts
- Experience utilizing industry-standard best practices and a donor-centric approach in managing a donor portfolio of more than 100 individuals and determining donors' philanthropic interests related to specific fundraising goals
- Proven ability to build and maintain long-term donor relationships. Ability to leverage relationships to strategically solicit donors, maximizing their full philanthropic capacity
- Excellent written and oral communication skills; behavioral and linguistic flexibility as well as strong intellectual and social curiosity
- Demonstrated ability to synthesize and prioritize information from a wide array of sources while maintaining attention to detail and effectively managing overall workflow
- Active listening with a successful track record of interacting with a broad array of constituents including donors, volunteers, colleagues, and administrators at the highest level
- Ability and willingness to travel
- Experience using Tessitura CRM software
- Proactive, productive team contributor with a positive attitude and a mindset that's persistent, results-oriented, and driven to succeed
- Appreciation and respect for principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Demonstrated ability to follow through on commitments and take responsibility for outcomes

- Demonstrated initiative, drive, and a resourceful and data-driven work ethic inspired by bold individual and team fundraising goals
- Creativity, innovation, and flexibility, with excellent organizational and analytical skills
- Ability to work independently, manage multiple projects effectively, and maintain a high degree of professionalism and confidentiality in a team-oriented, complex environment

## Location and Schedule

BLO's offices are located in the [Opera + Community Studios](#) in Boston's historic waterfront neighborhood of Fort Point, a creative area for working and living artists. The Studios were established through a partnership with Midway Artist Studios and comprise 16,000 square feet of space designed as a hub for artistic creation and cultural collaboration featuring multiple spaces, including BLO's offices, gathering spaces, and rehearsal studios.

BLO provides a hybrid work schedule, offering employees the opportunity to work primarily remotely, when circumstances allow. The Sr. MGO should prioritize attending BLO events and performances.

## Compensation

Compensation is highly competitive and budgeted in the range of \$120,000 – \$135,000 annually, depending on experience. Boston Lyric Opera offers a competitive benefits package, which adds significantly to the employee's total compensation package.

## Interested in Learning More?

Boston Lyric Opera has partnered with Talent Citizen to assist in this recruitment. Please contact President Tracy D. Welsh, Managing Associate Rachel K. Partin, and Associate José Cisneros to share your resume and cover letter via email at: [blo-smgo@talentcitizen.com](mailto:blo-smgo@talentcitizen.com).

*Boston Lyric Opera values diversity and is committed to creating an inclusive environment for all employees. All qualified candidates will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, national origin, genetics, disability, age, or veteran's status or any other protected category. BLO is an equal opportunity employer.*