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## Classic Opera Gets Legal Makeover with Help of WilmerHale Attorney

Deception. Betrayal. Murder. Opera? It was all in a day's work for litigation staff attorney Sarah Ashby, who also happens to be an active member of the [Boston Lyric Opera's](#) (BLO) BRAVO! Advisory Group. The advisory group provides feedback to the BLO and assists in planning events for the BRAVO! program, the BLO's young professionals initiative designed to cultivate the next generation of opera lovers.

On April 5, Ashby was at the John Joseph Moakley United States Federal Courthouse on Boston's waterfront before a judge and jury, defending none other than Don Giovanni, the infamous antagonist—elsewhere known as “Don Juan”—from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's opera by the same name. Not a singer herself, Ashby agreed to lend her expertise as an attorney during the BLO's Spring Overture, an event designed to preview upcoming opera. In this case, the Spring Overture was a mock trial performance in anticipation of the BLO's production of *Don Giovanni*.

“The goal of the BRAVO! Advisory Group is to cultivate younger audiences and make opera accessible to them, giving them access to opening night and the artists, and a behind-the-scenes look at productions,” explains Ashby. The BRAVO! program also offers educational, social and networking activities, discounted performance tickets, and invitations to special opera-related events throughout the year.

Though Ashby has been involved with the BLO since 2006, she was fairly new to the opera culture before being introduced to it at that time by a fellow Wellesley College alumna who was serving on the BLO's Board of Directors. “I had never been to an opera, but after organizing a group of college alums to see *La Traviata*, I was really excited about it,” she says. Now, Ashby can run through her favorites with ease. “I love *La Bohème* and *Don Giovanni*.”

With BLO board members and patrons looking on, Ashby made her acting debut at the Moakley Courthouse. “It was no easy feat,” she says of representing her “client” amidst a mountain of “evidence” against him, including FBI wiretap tapes and compelling statements from vocally-skilled “witnesses” whose “testimonies” were actually arias from *Don Giovanni*. And instead of deliberations, guests and participants were treated to a champagne luncheon with the Don and witnesses. “We took a lot of liberties with the rules of evidence and courtroom decorum, and brought some levity to the federal courthouse.”

Though opera is not her vocation, the program was certainly a valued experience for Ashby. “In law school, a judge came to speak to my class, and said it would be good for attorneys to have acting experience because it can make you a more interesting and persuasive advocate,” she explains.

As for Don Giovanni’s fate? “Per the jury instructions, you’ll have to go to the opera to find out,” says Ashby.