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# Search for a low-mass $\tau^- \tau^+$ resonance in association with a bottom quark in proton-proton collisions at $\sqrt{s} = 13$ TeV



## The CMS collaboration

*E-mail:* [cms-publication-committee-chair@cern.ch](mailto:cms-publication-committee-chair@cern.ch)

**ABSTRACT:** A general search is presented for a low-mass  $\tau^- \tau^+$  resonance produced in association with a bottom quark. The search is based on proton-proton collision data at a center-of-mass energy of 13 TeV collected by the CMS experiment at the LHC, corresponding to an integrated luminosity of  $35.9 \text{ fb}^{-1}$ . The data are consistent with the standard model expectation. Upper limits at 95% confidence level on the cross section times branching fraction are determined for two signal models: a light pseudoscalar Higgs boson decaying to a pair of  $\tau$  leptons produced in association with bottom quarks, and a low-mass boson X decaying to a  $\tau$ -lepton pair that is produced in the decay of a bottom-like quark B such that  $B \rightarrow bX$ . Masses between 25 and 70 GeV are probed for the light pseudoscalar boson with upper limits ranging from 250 to 44 pb. Upper limits from 20 to 0.3 pb are set on B masses between 170 and 450 GeV for X boson masses between 20 and 70 GeV.

**KEYWORDS:** Hadron-Hadron scattering (experiments), Higgs physics, Tau Physics

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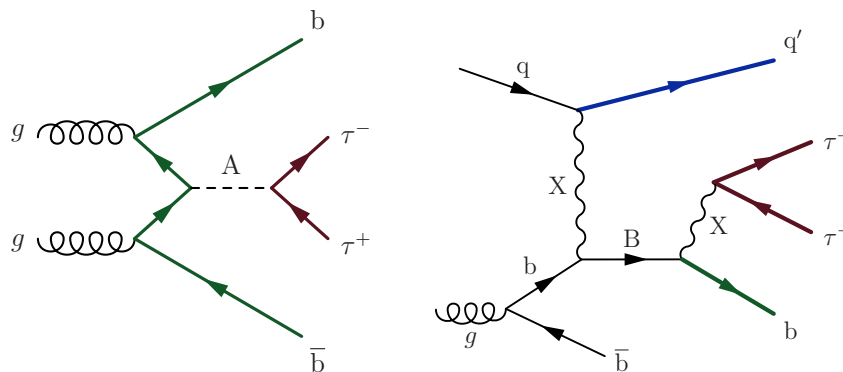
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**1 Introduction**

The observation of a Higgs boson by the ATLAS and the CMS Collaborations [1–3] represents a major step towards the understanding of the mechanism for electroweak symmetry breaking [4–6]. All measurements within the Higgs boson sector have so far been in general agreement with the predictions of the standard model (SM) [7, 8]. However, the SM cannot address several crucial issues, such as the hierarchy problem, the origin of the matter-antimatter asymmetry in the universe, and the nature of dark matter [9–12]. Theories beyond the SM have been proposed to address these open questions. Many of these predict the existence of more than one Higgs boson, or new resonances that preferentially decay to a pair of third-generation fermions, including  $\tau$  leptons.

In this analysis, a search for several scenarios of low-mass resonances that decay to a pair of  $\tau$  leptons of opposite charge is performed. In particular, we define multiple signal regions that are optimized based on two benchmark models that have final states with different kinematic properties. We consider a mass range between 20 and 70 GeV, as we



**Figure 1.** Feynman diagrams of (left) a low-mass pseudoscalar Higgs boson (A) produced in association with bottom quarks, and (right) a bottom-like quark produced in  $t$  channel, which decays into X and a bottom quark. The particle X decays into a  $\tau$ -lepton pair.

are bounded below by our kinematic requirements, and above 70 GeV by the background of the Z boson mass peak.

The first model describes a low-mass pseudoscalar Higgs boson A, produced in association with two bottom quarks ( $b\bar{b}A$ ), and decaying to a  $\tau$ -lepton pair. This is one of the preferred scenarios in the Two-Higgs-Doublet Models (2HDMs) [13–17]. Searches for signatures of  $b\bar{b}A$  or A pair production containing  $\tau$  leptons in the final state have been performed using pp collision data at a center-of-mass energy of 8 TeV collected by CMS [18, 19] and ATLAS [20], as well as with data at 13 TeV by CMS [21, 22]. Other searches by CMS and ATLAS for low-mass bosons exploit final states containing muons and b quarks [23–25], but also electrons [26, 27] or photons [28]. For this model, we choose events with a  $\tau$ -lepton pair and a central jet that is consistent with the decay of a b hadron (“b-tagged jet”). A Feynman diagram of this signal process at leading order (LO) is shown in figure 1 (left panel).

The second model describes a low-mass boson X decaying to a  $\tau$ -lepton pair in a process where the X boson is created through the decay of a vector-like quark (VLQ) [29–32]. In the scenario considered here, a heavy bottom-like quark B is produced in a  $t$ -channel process in association with a light quark, where an X boson acts as the propagator. It then decays via  $B \rightarrow bX$ , so that the final state topology is  $qbX$ . The B is typically scattered in the forward direction, and two categories of event selection are optimized to target this signature. Both categories require a jet consistent with the decay of a b hadron, with one category requiring an additional central jet with pseudorapidity  $|\eta| < 2.4$ , and one category requiring an additional forward jet with  $|\eta| > 2.4$ . With this selection, the analysis provides new sensitivity to vector-like quarks by targeting previously unexplored decays of heavy bottom-like quarks. The Feynman diagram of this signal process that is dominant at LO is also shown in figure 1 (right panel).

A number of other scenarios beyond the SM produce signatures similar to the two models considered. For example, Hidden Valley models [33, 34] predict a spin-one resonance decaying to lepton pairs; dark-force models [35] include the decay of a top quark to a bottom

quark and two GeV-scale bosons,  $W'$  and  $Z'$ , that decay to leptons [36, 37]; and new flavor changing neutral current interactions of the top quark, in which a new light X boson is produced in association with a single top quark and decays to lepton pairs [38]. Although these new physics scenarios are not considered in this analysis, the results can be applied to most of these cases in the kinematic regions explored in this work.

A previous analysis of proton-proton (pp) collision data taken at a center-of-mass energy of 8 TeV, exploring a similar final state focusing on dimuon resonances, has observed excesses at an invariant mass of 28 GeV that correspond to local significances of 4.2 and 2.9 standard deviations in the two event categories defined by the analysis [39]. Reference [39] also reports an analysis of data with a center-of-mass energy of 13 TeV, and finds both a 2.0 standard deviation excess and a 1.4 standard deviation deficit in the same two event categories, respectively. If there were a new heavy particle that had Yukawa-like couplings proportional to mass, the rate would be enhanced in the  $\tau\tau$  final state considered in this work, and would provide additional information on the couplings of such a new particle. Therefore, the results of this analysis are compared to those of ref. [39].

This analysis is based on pp collision data delivered by the LHC at CERN at a center-of-mass energy of 13 TeV. The data set corresponds to an integrated luminosity of  $35.9 \text{ fb}^{-1}$ , collected by the CMS detector during 2016. Only the semileptonic final states  $e\tau_h$  and  $\mu\tau_h$  are considered, where one of the  $\tau$  leptons decays into light leptons (electron or muon), and the other decays hadronically, denoted as  $\tau_h$ .

## 2 The CMS detector

The central feature of the CMS apparatus is a superconducting solenoid of 6 m internal diameter, providing a magnetic field of 3.8 T. Within the solenoid volume, there are a silicon pixel and strip tracker, a lead tungstate crystal electromagnetic calorimeter (ECAL), and a brass and scintillator hadron calorimeter, each composed of a barrel and two endcap sections. Forward calorimeters extend the pseudorapidity coverage provided by the barrel and endcap detectors from  $|\eta| < 3.0$  to  $|\eta| < 5.2$ . Muons are measured in gas-ionization detectors embedded in the steel flux-return yoke outside the solenoid.

Events of interest are selected using a two-tiered trigger system [40]. The first level, composed of custom hardware processors, uses information from the calorimeters and muon detectors to select events at a rate of around 100 kHz within a time interval of less than  $4 \mu\text{s}$ . The second level, known as the high-level trigger, consists of a farm of processors running a version of the full event reconstruction software optimized for fast processing, and reduces the event rate to about 1 kHz before data storage.

A more detailed description of the CMS detector, together with a definition of the coordinate system used and the relevant kinematic variables, can be found in ref. [41].

## 3 Simulated samples

Samples of simulated events are used to devise selection criteria, and estimate and validate background predictions. The main sources of background are the pair production of top

quarks ( $t\bar{t}$ ), single top quark production, W and Z boson production in association with jets, denoted as “W + jets” and “Z + jets”, diboson (WW, WZ, ZZ) production, and quantum chromodynamics (QCD) production of multijet events. The W + jets and Z + jets processes are simulated using the MADGRAPH5\_aMC@NLO [42] generator (2.2.2 and 2.3.3) at LO precision with the MLM jet matching and merging scheme [43]. The same generator is also used for diboson production simulated at next-to-leading order (NLO) precision with the FxFx jet matching and merging scheme [44], whereas POWHEG [45–47] 2.0 and 1.0 are used for  $t\bar{t}$  and single top quark production at NLO precision, respectively [48–51]. The Z + jets,  $t\bar{t}$ , and single top processes are normalized using cross sections computed at next-to-next-to-leading order (NNLO) in perturbative QCD [52–54].

The  $b\bar{b}A$  samples are produced with the PYTHIA 8.212 [55] generator with the pseudoscalar mass ( $m_A$ ) ranging from 25 to 70 GeV.

The qbX signals are generated with MADGRAPH5\_aMC@NLO, using the same production mechanism as for producing single top quarks in the  $t$ -channel. The b quark that initiates the qbX process is predominantly produced in gluon splittings, and is modeled by the four-flavor scheme (4FS), such that the b quark is not contained in the proton parton distribution functions. A previous comparison with data has shown that the absolute value of the transverse momentum ( $p_T = |\vec{p}_T|$ ) and  $\eta$  distributions of the top quark in simulated  $t$ -channel events is better modeled in the 4FS than in the five-flavor scheme [56]. Several samples with different values of  $m_X$ , ranging from 20 to 70 GeV, are generated. Mass values of 170, 300, and 450 GeV are considered for the B particle.

The event generators are interfaced with PYTHIA to model the parton showering and fragmentation, as well as the decay of the  $\tau$  leptons. The PYTHIA parameters affecting the description of the underlying event are set to the CUETP8M1 tune [57]. The NNPDF3.0 parton distribution functions [58] with the order matching that of the matrix element calculations are used with all generators. Generated events are processed through a simulation of the CMS detector based on GEANT4 [59], and are reconstructed with the same algorithms used for data. The simulated samples include additional pp interactions per bunch crossing, referred to as “pileup”. The effect of pileup is taken into account by generating concurrent total inelastic collision events with PYTHIA. The simulated events are weighted such that the distribution of the number of pileup interactions matches that in data, with an average of approximately 23 interactions per bunch crossing [60].

## 4 Event and object reconstruction

The reconstruction of observed and simulated events relies on the particle-flow (PF) algorithm [61], which combines information from the CMS subdetectors to reconstruct and identify the particles emerging from the pp collisions: charged and neutral hadrons, photons, muons, and electrons. This section describes how these PF objects are combined to reconstruct other physics objects such as jets,  $\tau_h$  candidates, or missing transverse momentum ( $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$ ). The primary pp interaction vertex of an event is taken to be the reconstructed vertex with the largest value of summed physics-object  $p_T^2$ .

After being reconstructed by the PF algorithm, electrons are identified with a multivariate analysis (MVA) [62] discriminant that combines several quantities describing the track quality, the shape of the energy deposits in the ECAL, and the compatibility of the measurements from the tracker and the ECAL [63]. Selected electrons must pass a discriminant requirement that rejects electrons coming from photon conversions. Muons are identified with requirements on the quality of the track reconstruction and on the number of measurements in the tracker and the muon system [64]. To reject nonprompt or misidentified leptons, a relative lepton isolation  $I_\ell$  ( $\ell = e, \mu$ ) is defined as follows:

$$I_\ell \equiv \frac{\sum_{\text{charged}} p_T + \max\left(0, \sum_{\text{neutral}} p_T - \frac{1}{2} \sum_{\text{charged, PU}} p_T\right)}{p_T^\ell}.$$

In this expression,  $\sum_{\text{charged}} p_T$  is the scalar  $p_T$  sum of the charged hadrons originating from the primary vertex, and located in a cone of size  $\Delta R = 0.3$  ( $0.4$ ) centered on the electron (muon) direction, where  $\Delta R = \sqrt{(\Delta\eta)^2 + (\Delta\phi)^2}$ ,  $\Delta\eta$  is the difference in pseudorapidity, and  $\Delta\phi$  is the difference in azimuthal angle in radians. The sum  $\sum_{\text{neutral}} p_T$  represents the same quantity for neutral hadrons and photons. The contribution of pileup photons and neutral hadrons is estimated from the scalar  $p_T$  sum of charged hadrons originating from pileup vertices,  $\sum_{\text{charged, PU}} p_T$ . This sum is multiplied by a factor of  $1/2$ , which corresponds approximately to the ratio of neutral- to charged-hadron production in the hadronization process of inelastic pp collisions, as estimated from simulation. In this analysis,  $I_e < 0.10$  ( $I_\mu < 0.15$ ) is used as the isolation requirement for the electron (muon).

Jets are reconstructed from PF candidates using the anti- $k_T$  clustering algorithm with a distance parameter of  $0.4$ , implemented in the FASTJET library [65–67]. Charged PF candidates not associated with the primary vertex of the interaction are not considered when reconstructing jets. An offset correction is applied to jet energies to take into account the contribution from additional pp interactions within the same or nearby bunch crossings [68]. The energy of a jet is calibrated based on simulation and data through correction factors [68]. Further identification requirements are applied to distinguish genuine jets from those arising from pileup [69], and additional selection criteria on the energy fractions and multiplicity of charged and neutral particles are applied to each event to remove spurious jet-like features originating from isolated noise patterns in certain HCAL regions [70]. In this analysis, jets are required to have  $p_T > 30$  GeV and  $|\eta| < 4.7$ , and must be separated from the selected leptons by  $\Delta R > 0.5$ . Jets originating from the hadronization of bottom quarks are identified using the combined secondary vertex algorithm [71], which exploits observables related to the long lifetime and large mass of b hadrons. The chosen b-tagging working point corresponds to an identification efficiency of approximately 60% with a misidentification rate of approximately 1% for jets originating from light quarks or gluons, and about 13% for jets originating from charm quarks.

The  $\tau_h$  candidates are reconstructed with the hadron-plus-strips algorithm [72], which is seeded with anti- $k_T$  jets. This algorithm reconstructs  $\tau_h$  candidates based on the number of charged hadrons and on the number of strips of ECAL crystals with energy deposits in the one-prong, one-prong +  $\pi^0$ , and three-prong decay modes. An MVA-based discrimi-

nant, including the isolation and lifetime information, is used to reduce the incidence of jets being misidentified as  $\tau_h$  candidates. The typical working point of this MVA-based isolation discriminant, as used in this analysis, has an efficiency of about 60% for a genuine  $\tau_h$ , with about a 0.1% misidentification rate for quark and gluon jets. Electrons and muons misidentified as  $\tau_h$  candidates are suppressed using dedicated criteria based on the consistency between the measurements in the tracker, calorimeters, and muon system.

The vector  $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$  is defined as the negative vectorial sum of the  $\vec{p}_T$  of all PF candidates [73, 74] originating from the primary vertex. The  $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$  is adjusted for the effect of jet energy corrections. Recoil corrections are applied to account for the mismodeling of  $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$  in simulated events of the  $Z + \text{jets}$  and  $W + \text{jets}$  processes. The corrections are performed on the variable that is defined as the vectorial difference between the measured  $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$  and the total  $\vec{p}_T$  of neutrinos originating from the decay of the  $W$  or  $Z$  boson. On average, this reduces the  $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$  obtained from simulation by a few GeV.

## 5 Event selection

The search is performed in events containing  $e\tau_h$  or  $\mu\tau_h$  (collectively  $\ell\tau_h$ ) candidates, produced in association with a b-tagged jet.

In order to select the  $e\tau_h$  ( $\mu\tau_h$ ) final states of the  $\tau$ -lepton pair, the trigger requirements are at least one isolated electron (muon) with  $p_T > 25$  (22) GeV, or the combination of at least one isolated electron (muon) with  $p_T > 24$  (19) GeV and one  $\tau_h$  candidate with  $p_T > 20$  GeV. In addition to the trigger requirements, a common “baseline selection” is applied, requiring the events to be consistent with the  $\ell\tau_h$  signature. Additional event selections to target the  $b\bar{b}A$  and  $qbX$  signatures are described in the following sections.

### 5.1 Baseline selection

The  $e\tau_h$  channel requires one electron candidate with  $p_T > 25$  GeV,  $|\eta| < 2.1$ , and relative isolation (defined in section 4) less than 0.10. The electron should be within a longitudinal distance  $d_z$  of 0.2 cm and a radial distance  $d_{xy}$  of 0.045 cm with respect to the primary vertex. One  $\tau_h$  candidate is required to have  $p_T > 20$  GeV,  $|\eta| < 2.3$ , and to pass the working point of the MVA-based isolation, as detailed in section 4. The selected electron and  $\tau_h$  should have an opening angle of  $\Delta R > 0.5$  and have opposite-sign (OS) electric charges. If multiple  $\tau_h$  candidates are found, the one with the best MVA-based isolation is selected.

Similarly,  $\mu\tau_h$  events are selected by requiring one muon candidate with  $p_T > 20$  GeV and  $|\eta| < 2.1$ . The relative isolation is taken to be less than 0.15. The same  $d_z$  and  $d_{xy}$  requirements as those imposed on electron candidates are applied to muons. The  $\tau_h$ -candidate selection is the same as for  $e\tau_h$  events.

For both the  $e\tau_h$  and  $\mu\tau_h$  channels, events with additional isolated electrons (or muons) with  $p_T > 10$  GeV and  $|\eta| < 2.5$  (2.1) that pass the same  $d_z$  and  $d_{xy}$  requirements, but a looser identification requirement, are discarded to reduce  $Z + \text{jets}$ ,  $t\bar{t}$  production, and diboson backgrounds, as well as to keep orthogonality between the  $e\tau_h$  and  $\mu\tau_h$  channels.

## 5.2 Additional selection for the $b\bar{b}A$ search

Signal events of the  $b\bar{b}A$  process are characterized by a  $\tau$ -lepton pair and two bottom quarks. In order to increase the signal purity, candidate events are required to have at least one b-tagged jet with  $p_T > 30$  GeV and  $|\eta| < 2.4$ . To further remove  $t\bar{t}$  background, events are required to have a transverse mass ( $m_T$ ) less than 40 GeV, where  $m_T$  is defined as

$$m_T = \sqrt{2p_T^\ell |\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}| (1 - \cos \Delta\phi)},$$

in which  $p_T^\ell$  is the  $p_T$  of the lepton and  $\Delta\phi$  is the azimuthal angle between the lepton direction and the  $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$  vector, which here is assumed to be due to the momenta of undetected neutrinos.

In addition, events are required to satisfy  $p_\zeta^{\text{miss}} - 0.85p_\zeta^{\text{vis}} > -40$  GeV, where  $p_\zeta^{\text{miss}}$  is the component of the  $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$  along the bisector of the  $\vec{p}_T$  of the lepton and  $\tau_h$ , while  $p_\zeta^{\text{vis}}$  is the sum of the parallel components of the lepton and  $\tau_h$ -candidate  $\vec{p}_T$  [75]. This variable quantifies the compatibility of events with the topology wherein the direction of neutrinos from the  $\tau$ -lepton decays are aligned with the direction of the visible  $\tau$ -lepton decay products. This requirement is optimized to remove a substantial amount of  $t\bar{t}$  as well as  $W + \text{jets}$  events.

## 5.3 Additional selection for the qbX search

The final-state bottom quark from  $qb \rightarrow q'B \rightarrow q'bX$  tends to be more centrally produced with a hard  $p_T$  spectrum, whereas the final-state light quark tends to be more forwardly scattered. This motivates two mutually exclusive categories of events. The first category requires one forward jet and one b-tagged jet, and is labeled as “1b1f”. Namely,

- one b-tagged jet with  $p_T > 30$  GeV and  $|\eta| < 2.4$ ;
- at least one forward jet with  $p_T > 30$  GeV and  $2.4 < |\eta| < 4.7$ ;
- no other jets with  $p_T > 30$  GeV and  $|\eta| < 2.4$ .

The second category, labeled as “1b1c”, has only two central jets:

- one b-tagged jet with  $p_T > 30$  GeV,  $|\eta| < 2.4$ ;
- exactly one other central jet with  $p_T > 30$  GeV and  $|\eta| < 2.4$ ;
- no forward jets with  $p_T > 30$  GeV and  $2.4 < |\eta| < 4.7$ .

In order to further reduce the dominant  $t\bar{t}$  background, an additional requirement of  $m_T < 60$  GeV is applied to events in both categories. This selection helps to reduce the  $t\bar{t}$  background by a factor of five in 1b1f, and by a factor of two in the 1b1c category, while maintaining a signal acceptance of 91 and 98%, respectively. Of all selected data events, 18% fall into 1b1f, and 82% into 1b1c.

After applying the event selection, an excess of events over the SM backgrounds is searched for using the distribution of the invariant mass of the  $\tau$ -lepton pair, constructed using the SVFIT mass algorithm [76, 77]. This algorithm approximates the invariant mass of



the  $\tau\tau$  system by exploiting information on the four-vectors of the lepton and  $\tau_h$ , combined with the  $xy$ -components of  $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$  and its covariance matrix. For better energy resolution, the  $\tau_h$  decay modes (one-prong, one-prong +  $\pi^0$ , and three-prong) are treated separately. Although the visible mass of the lepton and  $\tau_h$  system, defined as the invariant mass of the sum of four-vector from the visible particles, can be also used as a discriminant, the SVFIT mass  $m_{\tau\tau}$  is preferred since its peak position locates the resonance mass, while performing equally well in terms of the expected sensitivity. Considering that the typical resolution of the  $m_{\tau\tau}$  distribution is 10–15% [76, 77], a bin width of 5 GeV is chosen. The maximum likelihood fit method [78] is performed for the signal extraction, as detailed in section 8.

## 6 Background estimation

The dominant background in all search channels and categories comes from  $t\bar{t}$  production because of the presence of genuine electrons, muons,  $\tau$  leptons, and bottom quark jets from  $t\bar{t}$  decays. At lower masses, the QCD multijet background also becomes relevant, while around 90 GeV, there is a considerable  $Z + \text{jets}$  contribution. Additional small backgrounds are  $W + \text{jets}$ , diboson, and single top quark events.

For the  $b\bar{b}A$  search, simulated events are used to model  $t\bar{t}$  backgrounds, both for the normalization and the shape of the SVFIT mass distribution. The normalization of the  $t\bar{t}$  background is checked by defining a control region with a high  $t\bar{t}$  purity and little signal contamination by requiring  $|\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}| > 60$  GeV and  $m_T > 60$  GeV. All other selection requirements stay the same. The data and simulation show close agreement within statistical uncertainty. Therefore, simulated events are used to predict the yield of  $t\bar{t}$  background processes in the signal region without scaling, as well as the associated uncertainties in the cross section.

For the qbX search, on the other hand, additional requirements on the jet multiplicity can cause mismodeling of the  $t\bar{t}$  background. A control region is defined with the same jet category selections as described in section 5.3, as well as  $|\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}| > 60$  GeV and  $m_T > 60$  GeV requirements. The data-to-simulation scale factors for the  $t\bar{t}$  events are then calculated such that the simulated number of events agrees with data in these sidebands. In the  $e\tau_h$  ( $\mu\tau_h$ ) channel, the scale factor is found to be 0.82 (0.85) for the 1b1f category, and 1.02 (0.97) for the 1b1c category. The statistical uncertainties in these scale factors are up to 6% and considered as nuisance parameters in the combined fit.

The QCD multijet background, in which one jet is misidentified as a  $\tau_h$  candidate and another as a lepton, is small and is estimated using a control region where the lepton and the  $\tau_h$  candidate have same-sign (SS) electric charges. In this control region, the QCD multijet yield is obtained by subtracting from the data the contribution from the  $Z + \text{jets}$ ,  $t\bar{t}$ ,  $W + \text{jets}$ , and other SM background processes, as determined from simulation. The expected contribution of the QCD multijet background in the OS signal region is then derived by rescaling the yield obtained in the SS control region by a factor of 1.1, which is measured using a high-purity QCD multijet sample obtained by inverting the lepton isolation requirement. The QCD multijet background estimation results in up to 20% rate uncertainties, accounting for the statistical precision in the region where the

extrapolation factor from the SS to OS region is measured. This uncertainty also covers potential dependencies of the OS/SS extrapolation factors on the invariant  $\tau\tau$  mass.

For the W + jets background, the shape is modeled on the basis of simulated events, while its normalization is determined from data using a sideband with  $m_T > 80$  GeV. The W + jets simulation is normalized such that the overall yield of the simulated events, including the QCD contribution estimated above, matches the data yield in the sideband with  $m_T > 80$  GeV after the baseline selection but before any jet selection. The scale factor necessary for the W + jets simulated events is found to be 0.95. The uncertainties in the W + jets event yields estimated from data are as large as 5%. This uncertainty accounts for the statistical limitation of data in the high- $m_T$  sideband, the statistical limitation of the simulated W + jets sample, the systematic uncertainties of other processes in the same region, and the extrapolation from high- to low- $m_T$  regions.

Minor backgrounds, such as diboson and single top quark processes, are estimated from simulation.

## 7 Systematic uncertainties

A binned maximum likelihood fit of the observed  $m_{\tau\tau}$  distribution is used to search for a possible signal over the expected background. The  $m_{\tau\tau}$  range from 0 to 350 GeV is used, such that the backgrounds can be constrained by data in the high mass sideband, where the signal is not expected.

Systematic uncertainties may affect the normalization or the shape of the  $m_{\tau\tau}$  distribution of the signal and background processes. These uncertainties are represented by nuisance parameters in the fit, as described below, and summarized in table 1. We note that systematic uncertainties play a small role in this analysis, as the measurement is ultimately limited by the size of the data sample.

### 7.1 Normalization uncertainties

The uncertainty in the integrated luminosity amounts to 2.5% [60] and affects the normalization of the signal and background processes that are based on simulation. Uncertainties in the electron or muon identification and trigger efficiency amount to 2% each [79]. The  $\tau_h$  identification and trigger efficiency have been measured using the “tag-and-probe” technique [72] and an overall rate uncertainty of 10% is assigned. For events where electrons or muons are misidentified as  $\tau_h$  candidates, predominantly  $Z \rightarrow ee$  events in the  $e\tau_h$  channel and  $Z \rightarrow \mu\mu$  events in the  $\mu\tau_h$  channel, a rate uncertainties of 12 and 25% [80], respectively, are applied, as determined by a tag-and-probe method. The acceptance uncertainty because of the b tagging efficiency (mistag rate) has been determined to be 3 (5)%. The momentum scale uncertainty in  $|\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}|$  [73, 74] affects the event yields due to selection requirements on the  $m_T$  variable and is estimated to be up to 4%. The uncertainties in the W + jets event yields estimated from data can be as large as 5%, as detailed in section 6. The QCD multijet background estimation is found to have rate uncertainties up to 20%. The normalization uncertainty on the Z + jets yield is estimated using a dedicated control region in events with two  $\tau_h$  candidates and at least one b-tagged jet. A 20% uncertainty is

assigned to the  $Z + \text{jets}$  normalization on the basis of the expected fluctuations in the total number of data events in this control region. For the  $t\bar{t}$  background, an uncertainty of 6% in the cross section is computed for the 1 b tag category [53], while in the 1b1f and 1b1c categories, a 6% uncertainty is determined from a control region, as previously described. The uncertainties in the cross section for the diboson and single top quark processes are 6 and 5.5%, respectively.

Finally, theoretical uncertainties in the  $b\bar{b}A$  cross section calculation due to NNLO corrections for A masses below 50 GeV increase significantly, as is shown in figure 263 of ref. [81]. Therefore, a conservatively estimated uncertainty of 50% is assigned to the  $b\bar{b}A$  signal yield.

## 7.2 Shape uncertainties

The stability of the shape and the normalization of the  $m_{\tau\tau}$  distribution are tested with respect to the uncertainties in the  $\tau_h$  and jet energy scales for the signal and background processes. The uncertainty is estimated by varying the  $\tau_h$  and jet energies within their respective uncertainties and recomputing  $m_{\tau\tau}$  after the final selection. The uncertainty in the  $\tau_h$  energy scale amounts to 3% [72], and the uncertainties in the jet energy scale are up to 4%, depending on the jet  $p_T$  and  $\eta$  [68]. However, the variation of the  $m_{\tau\tau}$  distribution due to the jet energy scale is found to be negligible, and therefore, only normalization uncertainties of 4% are considered. Similarly, for events where a jet, muon, or electron is misidentified as a  $\tau_h$  candidate, a shape uncertainty is derived by varying the reconstructed  $p_T$  of the  $\tau_h$  candidate by 3%, and recomputing  $m_{\tau\tau}$  after the final selection. The variations due to the electron and muon momentum scales are found to be negligible.

Finally, uncertainties related to the limited number of simulated events are taken into account. They are considered for all bins of the distributions that are used to extract the results. They are uncorrelated across the different samples and across the bins of a single distribution.

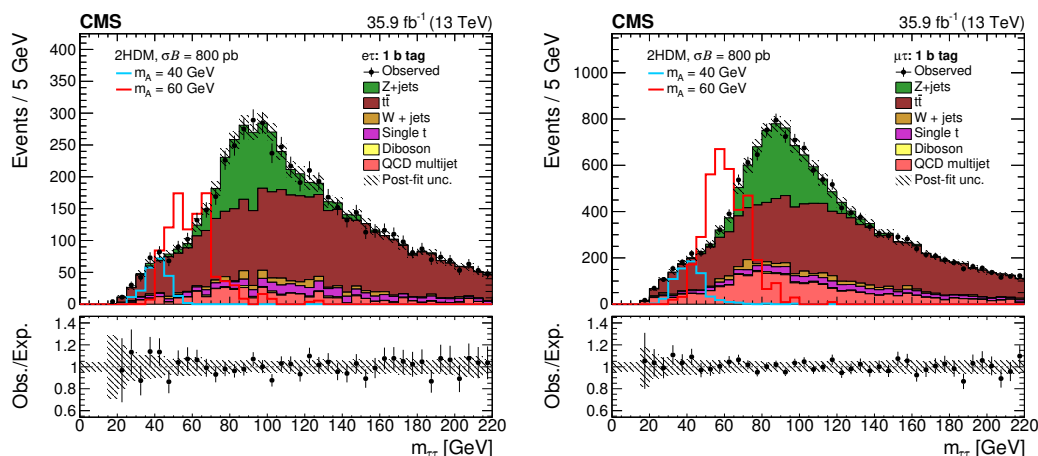
## 8 Results

Figure 2 (3) shows the SVFIT mass distributions in the  $e\tau_h$  and  $\mu\tau_h$  channel for the  $b\bar{b}A$  (qbX) search. Two signal contributions from a pseudoscalar (an X boson) are overlaid assuming a mass of 40 or 60 GeV, normalized to an arbitrary cross section times branching fraction. The uncertainty bands on the histograms of simulated events represent the sum in quadrature of statistical and systematic uncertainties, taking the full covariance matrix of all nuisance parameters into account. However, uncertainties related to simulated events play a small role as the measurement is ultimately limited by the size of the data sample.

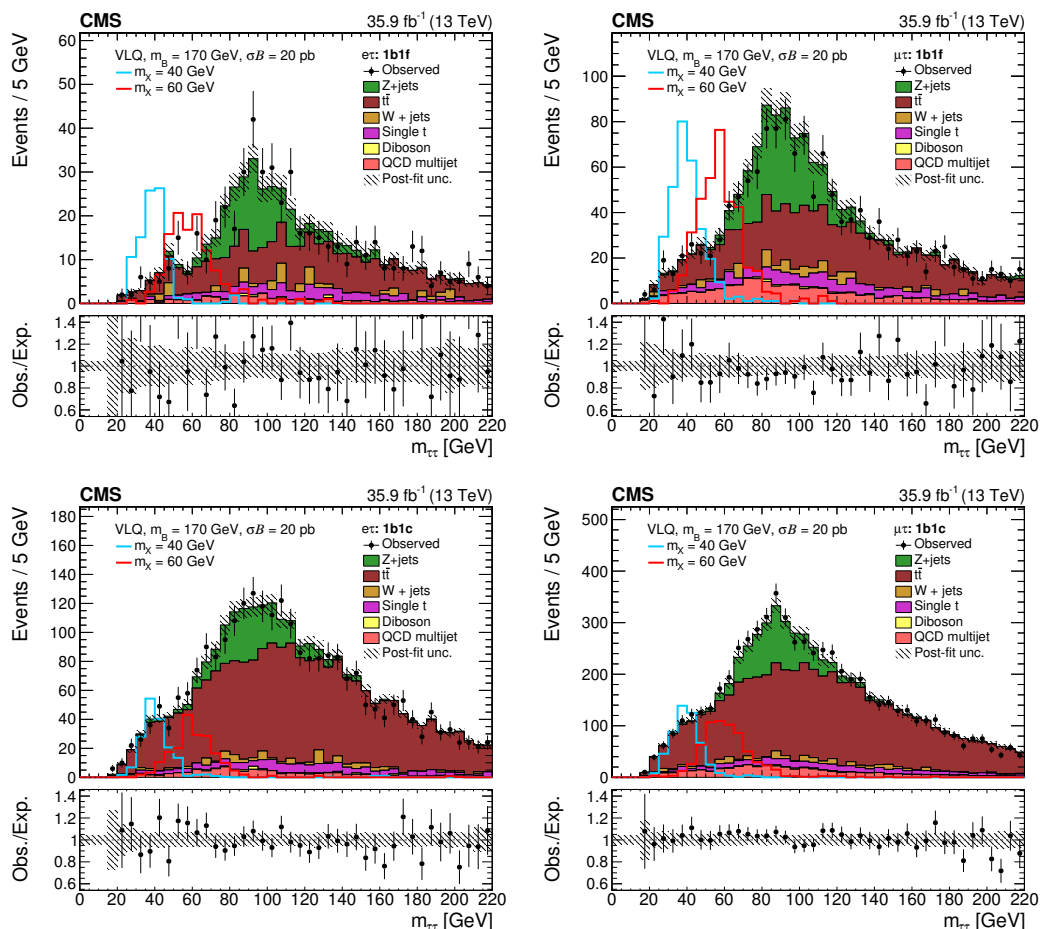
The data are consistent with the background-only hypothesis of the SM, therefore, we set an upper limit on the cross section by using the asymptotic  $CL_s$  modified-frequentist criterion [78, 82–84]. Figure 4 shows the observed and expected upper limits, at 95% confidence level, on the cross section of  $b\bar{b}A$  production times branching fraction of  $A \rightarrow \tau\tau$  as a function of the pseudoscalar mass,  $m_A$ . Representative 2HDMs with varied sets of the

Systematic source	Involved processes	Change in acceptance or shape	
		$e\tau_h$	$\mu\tau_h$
Integrated luminosity	Simulated processes	2.5%	—
Electron ident. & trigger	Simulated processes	2%	—
Muon ident. & trigger	Simulated processes	—	2%
$\tau_h$ ident. & trigger	Simulated processes	10%	—
e misidentified as $\tau_h$	$Z \rightarrow ee$	12%	—
$\mu$ misidentified as $\tau_h$	$Z \rightarrow \mu\mu$	—	25%
b tagging efficiency, mistag rate	Simulated processes	3–5%	—
$ \vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}} $ scale	Simulated processes	Up to 4%	—
W + jets normalization	W + jets	5%	—
QCD multijet normalization	QCD multijet	20%	—
Z + jets normalization	$Z \rightarrow \tau\tau$	20%	—
$t\bar{t}$ normalization	$t\bar{t}$ (1b1f, 1b1c only)	6%	—
$t\bar{t}$ cross section	$t\bar{t}$ ( $b\bar{b}A$ only)	6%	—
Diboson cross section	Diboson	6%	—
Single top quark cross section	Single top quark	5.5%	—
$b\bar{b}A$ cross section	Signal ( $b\bar{b}A$ only)	50%	—
$\tau_h$ energy scale	Simulated processes	Shape	—
$e/\mu \rightarrow \tau_h$ energy scale	Simulated processes	Shape	—
Jet energy scale	Simulated processes	4%	—
Jet misidentified as $\tau_h$	Z + jets	Shape	—
Limited event count	All processes	Shape	—

**Table 1.** Sources of systematic uncertainties and their effects on the acceptance or shape resulting from a variation of the nuisance parameter equivalent to one standard deviation.

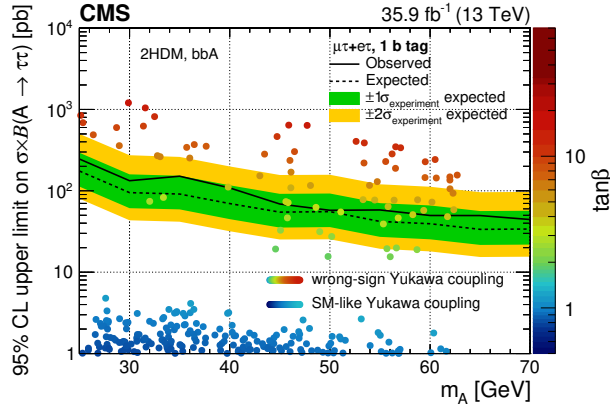


**Figure 2.** Measured  $m_{\tau\tau}$  distribution in the  $e\tau_h$  (left), and  $\mu\tau_h$  (right) channel, compared to the expected SM background contributions. The signal distributions for  $b\bar{b}A$  with a pseudoscalar mass of 40 and 60 GeV are overlaid to illustrate the sensitivity. They are normalized to the cross section times branching fraction of 800 pb. The uncertainty bands represent the sum in quadrature of statistical and systematic uncertainties obtained from the fit. The lower panels show the ratio between the observed and expected events in each bin.

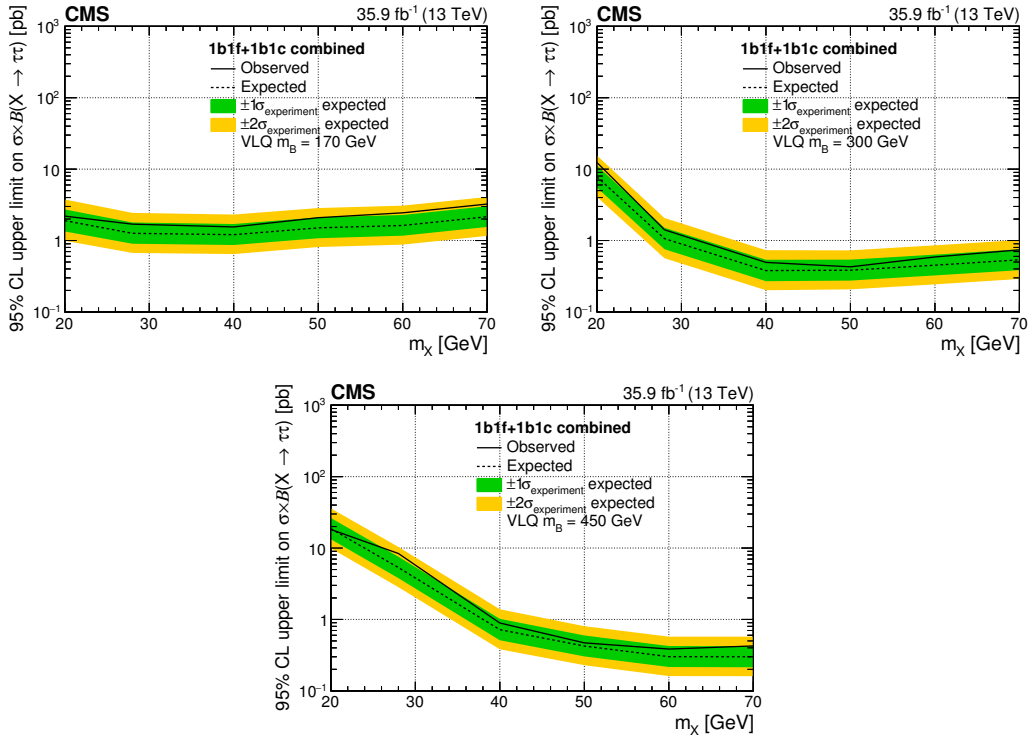


**Figure 3.** Measured  $m_{\tau\tau}$  distribution in the  $e\tau_h$  (left), and  $\mu\tau_h$  (right) final states, for the 1b1f (upper) and 1b1c (lower) categories, compared to the expected SM background contributions. The signal distributions for the VLQ model with X boson masses of 40 and 60 GeV are overlaid to illustrate the sensitivity. They are normalized to the cross section times branching fraction of 20 pb. The uncertainty bands represent the sum in quadrature of statistical and systematic uncertainties obtained from the fit. The lower panels show the ratio between the observed and expected events in each bin.

$\tan\beta$  and  $m_A$  parameters are also shown for two types of Yukawa couplings to the down-type fermions: one which is SM-like, and one in which the Yukawa coupling is negative and referred to as “wrong-sign” [85]. We consider a  $\tan\beta$  range of 0.6 to 2.0 (1.6 to 37) for the SM-like (wrong-sign) Yukawa coupling scenario with  $m_A < 65$  GeV. The cross sections for the wrong-sign Yukawa couplings are up to several orders of magnitude larger and have larger  $\tan\beta$ . Most of the cross sections for these models with  $\tan\beta > 3$  are excluded by the current data. For signal events with an  $m_A$  ranging from 30 to 70 GeV and A decaying to a pair of  $\tau$  leptons, the efficiency to pass the final selection criteria of the 1 b tag category of the  $\mu\tau_h$  final state, including detector acceptance, selection efficiency, and branching fraction of  $A \rightarrow \tau\tau$ , ranges from 0.002 to 0.022%. Figure 5 shows the same for the qbX process in the VLQ model, but as a function of the X boson mass  $m_X$ , for B masses of 170,



**Figure 4.** Observed (solid) and expected (dashed) limits at 95% confidence level on the product of cross section for the production of the  $b\bar{b}A$  signal and branching fraction  $A \rightarrow \tau\tau$ , obtained from the combination of the  $e\tau_h$  and  $\mu\tau_h$  channels. The green and yellow bands represent the one and two standard deviation uncertainties in the expected limits. Representative 2HDMs with varied sets of the  $\tan\beta$  and  $m_A$  parameters are overlaid for two types of Yukawa couplings to the down-type fermions: one which is SM-like, and one in which the Yukawa coupling is negative (“wrong-sign”).



**Figure 5.** Observed (solid) and expected (dotted) limits at 95% confidence level on the product of cross section for the production of the  $qbX$  signal and branching fraction  $X \rightarrow \tau\tau$ , obtained from the combination of the  $e\tau_h$  and  $\mu\tau_h$  channels. The  $m_B$  values of 170 (upper left), 300 (upper right), and 450 GeV are considered. The green and yellow bands represent the one and two standard deviation uncertainties in the expected limits.

300, and 450 GeV. For both searches, the sensitivity is lower in the low-mass region because of the soft  $p_T$  spectrum of the  $\tau_h$  candidate yielding a lower signal detection efficiency. In addition, as the boson mass decreases, the trajectories of the two  $\tau$  leptons are in close vicinity and start to spoil each other's isolation requirement. For the qbX search, the 1b1f category drives the sensitivity, as can be inferred from figure 3. For signal events in which  $m_B = 170$  GeV, with an X mass ranging from 30 to 70 GeV and decaying to a pair of  $\tau$  leptons, the efficiency to pass the final selection criteria of the 1b1f category of the  $\mu\tau_h$  final state ranges from 0.03 to 0.06%. These values range from 0.02 to 0.10% for the same final state of the 1b1c category.

We proceed to make a comparison with ref. [39], that is based on the same data set as this paper, and defines two similar signal event categories, but with a dimuon pair in the final state instead of a  $\tau$ -lepton pair. Upper limits are set at 95% confidence level on the fiducial cross section for the production of a 28 GeV particle decaying to two muons. Because the analysis does not consider a signal model that specifies the kinematic acceptance, it defines the fiducial cross section as

$$\sigma_{\text{fid}} = \frac{N_S}{L\epsilon_{\text{reco}}^{\mu\mu}},$$

where  $N_S$  is the number of signal events extracted from the fit to the dimuon mass spectrum,  $L$  is the integrated luminosity, and  $\epsilon_{\text{reco}}^{\mu\mu} = 0.28$  is the reconstruction efficiency, which takes into account the muon trigger, identification and isolation, as well as the b-tagging efficiency. To compare these results to the present analysis with a  $\tau$ -lepton pair in the final state, we consider only the most sensitive final state,  $\mu\tau_h$ . The reconstruction efficiency  $\epsilon_{\text{reco}}^{\mu\tau_h}$  for this final state is estimated to be 0.10. This includes the muon trigger, identification and isolation, as well as the  $\tau_h$  identification and b tagging efficiency. Taking into account  $\epsilon_{\text{reco}}^{\mu\tau_h}$ , the upper limit on the fiducial cross section is 0.029 (0.057) pb for 1b1f (1b1c), while for the dimuon search, the upper limit is 0.0037 (0.0032) pb for similar event categories. As expected, this analysis is less sensitive than the dimuon search to a hypothetical signal that decays equally to all flavors of leptons. However, if there were a Yukawa-type enhancement between the signal and the  $\tau$  leptons, then the constraints on the signal production cross section by this analysis would improve by a factor of  $m_\tau^2/m_\mu^2$ .

## 9 Summary

This paper presents a general search for a low-mass  $\tau^- \tau^+$  resonance produced in association with a bottom quark. After defining the signal region by the presence of an electron or muon consistent with the decay of a  $\tau$  lepton, a hadronically decaying  $\tau$  lepton, and a jet originating from a bottom quark, an excess over standard model background is searched for in the reconstructed invariant mass distribution of the inferred  $\tau\tau$  system. The data are consistent with the standard model background. We set upper limits at 95% confidence level on the cross section times branching fraction for two signal models: a light pseudoscalar Higgs boson decaying to a pair of  $\tau$  leptons produced in association with a bottom quark, and a low-mass boson X decaying to a  $\tau$ -lepton pair that is produced in the decay

of a bottom-like quark  $B$  as  $B \rightarrow bX$ . For both scenarios,  $X$  boson masses between 20 and 70 GeV are probed. Upper limits at 95% confidence level ranging from 250 to 44 pb are set on the light pseudoscalar, and from 20 to 0.3 pb on  $B$  masses between 170 and 450 GeV. This is the first search for an  $X$  resonance in this final state using the center-of-mass energy of 13 TeV. Since many extensions of the standard model have similar event kinematics as this analysis, these results could also be applied to put constraints on other low-mass  $\tau\tau$  resonances. If there were a Yukawa-type enhancement between the signal and the  $\tau$  leptons, then the constraints on the signal production cross section by this analysis would improve by a factor of  $m_\tau^2/m_\mu^2$ .

The optimized selection of this analysis targets previously unexplored decays of heavy bottom-like quarks, providing new sensitivity to vector-like quarks.

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**The CMS collaboration****Yerevan Physics Institute, Yerevan, Armenia**

A.M. Sirunyan, A. Tumasyan

**Institut für Hochenergiephysik, Wien, Austria**

W. Adam, F. Ambrogio, E. Asilar, T. Bergauer, J. Brandstetter, M. Dragicevic, J. Erö, A. Escalante Del Valle, M. Flechl, R. Frühwirth<sup>1</sup>, V.M. Ghete, J. Hrubec, M. Jeitler<sup>1</sup>, N. Krammer, I. Krätschmer, D. Liko, T. Madlener, I. Mikulec, N. Rad, H. Rohringer, J. Schieck<sup>1</sup>, R. Schöffbeck, M. Spanring, D. Spitzbart, W. Waltenberger, J. Wittmann, C.-E. Wulz<sup>1</sup>, M. Zarucki

**Institute for Nuclear Problems, Minsk, Belarus**

V. Chekhovsky, V. Mossolov, J. Suarez Gonzalez

**Universiteit Antwerpen, Antwerpen, Belgium**

E.A. De Wolf, D. Di Croce, X. Janssen, J. Lauwers, A. Lelek, M. Pieters, H. Van Haevermaet, P. Van Mechelen, N. Van Remortel

**Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussel, Belgium**

S. Abu Zeid, F. Blekman, J. D'Hondt, J. De Clercq, K. Deroover, G. Flouris, D. Lonkowskyi, S. Lowette, I. Marchesini, S. Moortgat, L. Moreels, Q. Python, K. Skovpen, S. Tavernier, W. Van Doninck, P. Van Mulders, I. Van Parijs

**Université Libre de Bruxelles, Bruxelles, Belgium**

D. Beghin, B. Bilin, H. Brun, B. Clerbaux, G. De Lentdecker, H. Delannoy, B. Dorney, G. Fasanella, L. Favart, A. Grebenyuk, A.K. Kalsi, J. Luetic, N. Postiau, E. Starling, L. Thomas, C. Vander Velde, P. Vanlaer, D. Vannerom, Q. Wang

**Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium**

T. Cornelis, D. Dobur, A. Fagot, M. Gul, I. Khvastunov<sup>2</sup>, C. Roskas, D. Trocino, M. Tytgat, W. Verbeke, B. Vermassen, M. Vit, N. Zaganidis

**Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium**

H. Bakhshiansohi, O. Bondu, G. Bruno, C. Caputo, P. David, C. Delaere, M. Delcourt, A. Giammanco, G. Krintiras, V. Lemaitre, A. Magitteri, K. Piotrkowski, A. Saggio, M. Vidal Marono, P. Vischia, J. Zobec

**Centro Brasileiro de Pesquisas Fisicas, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**

F.L. Alves, G.A. Alves, G. Correia Silva, C. Hensel, A. Moraes, M.E. Pol, P. Rebello Teles

**Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**

E. Belchior Batista Das Chagas, W. Carvalho, J. Chinellato<sup>3</sup>, E. Coelho, E.M. Da Costa, G.G. Da Silveira<sup>4</sup>, D. De Jesus Damiao, C. De Oliveira Martins, S. Fonseca De Souza, H. Malbouisson, D. Matos Figueiredo, M. Melo De Almeida, C. Mora Herrera, L. Mundim, H. Nogima, W.L. Prado Da Silva, L.J. Sanchez Rosas, A. Santoro, A. Sznajder, M. Thiel, E.J. Tonelli Manganote<sup>3</sup>, F. Torres Da Silva De Araujo, A. Vilela Pereira

**Universidade Estadual Paulista<sup>a</sup>, Universidade Federal do ABC<sup>b</sup>, São Paulo, Brazil**

S. Ahuja<sup>a</sup>, C.A. Bernardes<sup>a</sup>, L. Calligaris<sup>a</sup>, T.R. Fernandez Perez Tomei<sup>a</sup>, E.M. Gregores<sup>b</sup>, P.G. Mercadante<sup>b</sup>, S.F. Novaes<sup>a</sup>, SandraS. Padula<sup>a</sup>

**Institute for Nuclear Research and Nuclear Energy, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria**

A. Aleksandrov, R. Hadjiiska, P. Iaydjiev, A. Marinov, M. Misheva, M. Rodozov, M. Shopova, G. Sultanov

**University of Sofia, Sofia, Bulgaria**

A. Dimitrov, L. Litov, B. Pavlov, P. Petkov

**Beihang University, Beijing, China**

W. Fang<sup>5</sup>, X. Gao<sup>5</sup>, L. Yuan

**Institute of High Energy Physics, Beijing, China**

M. Ahmad, J.G. Bian, G.M. Chen, H.S. Chen, M. Chen, Y. Chen, C.H. Jiang, D. Leggat, H. Liao, Z. Liu, S.M. Shaheen<sup>6</sup>, A. Spiezia, J. Tao, E. Yazgan, H. Zhang, S. Zhang<sup>6</sup>, J. Zhao

**State Key Laboratory of Nuclear Physics and Technology, Peking University, Beijing, China**

Y. Ban, G. Chen, A. Levin, J. Li, L. Li, Q. Li, Y. Mao, S.J. Qian, D. Wang

**Tsinghua University, Beijing, China**

Y. Wang

**Universidad de Los Andes, Bogota, Colombia**

C. Avila, A. Cabrera, C.A. Carrillo Montoya, L.F. Chaparro Sierra, C. Florez, C.F. González Hernández, M.A. Segura Delgado

**University of Split, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture, Split, Croatia**

N. Godinovic, D. Lelas, I. Puljak, T. Sculac

**University of Split, Faculty of Science, Split, Croatia**

Z. Antunovic, M. Kovac

**Institute Rudjer Boskovic, Zagreb, Croatia**

V. Brigljevic, D. Ferencek, K. Kadija, B. Mesic, M. Roguljic, A. Starodumov<sup>7</sup>, T. Susa

**University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus**

M.W. Ather, A. Attikis, M. Kolosova, G. Mavromanolakis, J. Mousa, C. Nicolaou, F. Ptochos, P.A. Razis, H. Rykaczewski

**Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic**

M. Finger<sup>8</sup>, M. Finger Jr.<sup>8</sup>

**Escuela Politecnica Nacional, Quito, Ecuador**

E. Ayala



**Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Quito, Ecuador**

E. Carrera Jarrin

**Academy of Scientific Research and Technology of the Arab Republic of Egypt,  
Egyptian Network of High Energy Physics, Cairo, Egypt**

A.A. Abdelalim<sup>9,10</sup>, S. Elgammal<sup>11</sup>, S. Khalil<sup>10</sup>

**National Institute of Chemical Physics and Biophysics, Tallinn, Estonia**

S. Bhowmik, A. Carvalho Antunes De Oliveira, R.K. Dewanjee, K. Ehataht, M. Kadastik,  
M. Raidal, C. Veelken

**Department of Physics, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland**

P. Eerola, H. Kirschenmann, J. Pekkanen, M. Voutilainen

**Helsinki Institute of Physics, Helsinki, Finland**

J. Havukainen, J.K. Heikkilä, T. Järvinen, V. Karimäki, R. Kinnunen, T. Lampén,  
K. Lassila-Perini, S. Laurila, S. Lehti, T. Lindén, P. Luukka, T. Mäenpää, H. Siikonen,  
E. Tuominen, J. Tuominiemi

**Lappeenranta University of Technology, Lappeenranta, Finland**

T. Tuuva

**IRFU, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay, Gif-sur-Yvette, France**

M. Besancon, F. Couderc, M. Dejardin, D. Denegri, J.L. Faure, F. Ferri, S. Ganjour,  
A. Givernaud, P. Gras, G. Hamel de Monchenault, P. Jarry, C. Leloup, E. Locci, J. Malcles,  
G. Negro, J. Rander, A. Rosowsky, M.Ö. Sahin, M. Titov

**Laboratoire Leprince-Ringuet, Ecole polytechnique, CNRS/IN2P3, Université  
Paris-Saclay, Palaiseau, France**

A. Abdulsalam<sup>12</sup>, C. Amendola, I. Antropov, F. Beaudette, P. Busson, C. Charlot,  
R. Granier de Cassagnac, I. Kucher, A. Lobanov, J. Martin Blanco, C. Martin Perez,  
M. Nguyen, C. Ochando, G. Ortona, P. Paganini, J. Rembser, R. Salerno, J.B. Sauvan,  
Y. Sirois, A.G. Stahl Leiton, A. Zabi, A. Zghiche

**Université de Strasbourg, CNRS, IPHC UMR 7178, Strasbourg, France**

J.-L. Agram<sup>13</sup>, J. Andrea, D. Bloch, G. Bourgatte, J.-M. Brom, E.C. Chabert,  
V. Cherepanov, C. Collard, E. Conte<sup>13</sup>, J.-C. Fontaine<sup>13</sup>, D. Gelé, U. Goerlach, M. Jansová,  
A.-C. Le Bihan, N. Tonon, P. Van Hove

**Centre de Calcul de l'Institut National de Physique Nucleaire et de Physique  
des Particules, CNRS/IN2P3, Villeurbanne, France**

S. Gadrat

**Université de Lyon, Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, CNRS-IN2P3, Institut  
de Physique Nucléaire de Lyon, Villeurbanne, France**

S. Beauceron, C. Bernet, G. Boudoul, N. Chanon, R. Chierici, D. Contardo, P. Depasse,  
H. El Mamouni, J. Fay, L. Finco, S. Gascon, M. Gouzevitch, G. Grenier, B. Ille, F. Lagarde,  
I.B. Laktineh, H. Lattaud, M. Lethuillier, L. Mirabito, S. Perries, A. Popov<sup>14</sup>, V. Sordini,  
G. Touquet, M. Vander Donckt, S. Viret

**Georgian Technical University, Tbilisi, Georgia**

T. Toriashvili<sup>15</sup>

**Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia**

Z. Tsamalaidze<sup>8</sup>

**RWTH Aachen University, I. Physikalisches Institut, Aachen, Germany**

C. Autermann, L. Feld, M.K. Kiesel, K. Klein, M. Lipinski, M. Preuten, M.P. Rauch, C. Schomakers, J. Schulz, M. Teroerde, B. Wittmer

**RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut A, Aachen, Germany**

A. Albert, M. Erdmann, S. Erdweg, T. Esch, R. Fischer, S. Ghosh, T. Hebbeker, C. Heidemann, K. Hoepfner, H. Keller, L. Mastrolorenzo, M. Merschmeyer, A. Meyer, P. Millet, S. Mukherjee, T. Pook, A. Pozdnyakov, M. Radziej, H. Reithler, M. Rieger, A. Schmidt, D. Teyssier, S. Thüer

**RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut B, Aachen, Germany**

G. Flügge, O. Hlushchenko, T. Kress, T. Müller, A. Nehr Korn, A. Nowack, C. Pistone, O. Pooth, D. Roy, H. Sert, A. Stahl<sup>16</sup>

**Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron, Hamburg, Germany**

M. Aldaya Martin, T. Arndt, C. Asawatangkuldee, I. Babounikau, K. Beernaert, O. Behnke, U. Behrens, A. Bermúdez Martínez, D. Bertsche, A.A. Bin Anuar, K. Borras<sup>17</sup>, V. Botta, A. Campbell, P. Connor, C. Contreras-Campana, V. Danilov, A. De Wit, M.M. Defranchis, C. Diez Pardos, D. Domínguez Damiani, G. Eckerlin, T. Eichhorn, A. Elwood, E. Eren, E. Gallo<sup>18</sup>, A. Geiser, J.M. Grados Luyando, A. Grohsjean, M. Guthoff, M. Haranko, A. Harb, H. Jung, M. Kasemann, J. Keaveney, C. Kleinwort, J. Knolle, D. Krücker, W. Lange, T. Lenz, J. Leonard, K. Lipka, W. Lohmann<sup>19</sup>, R. Mankel, I.-A. Melzer-Pellmann, A.B. Meyer, M. Meyer, M. Missiroli, G. Mittag, J. Mnich, V. Myronenko, S.K. Pflitsch, D. Pitzl, A. Raspereza, A. Saibel, M. Savitskyi, P. Saxena, P. Schütze, C. Schwanenberger, R. Shevchenko, A. Singh, H. Tholen, O. Turkot, A. Vagnerini, M. Van De Klundert, G.P. Van Onsem, R. Walsh, Y. Wen, K. Wichmann, C. Wissing, O. Zenaiev

**University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany**

R. Aggleton, S. Bein, L. Benato, A. Benecke, T. Dreyer, A. Ebrahimi, E. Garutti, D. Gonzalez, P. Gunnellini, J. Haller, A. Hinzmann, A. Karavdina, G. Kasieczka, R. Klanner, R. Kogler, N. Kovalchuk, S. Kurz, V. Kutzner, J. Lange, D. Marconi, J. Multhaupt, M. Niedziela, C.E.N. Niemeyer, D. Nowatschin, A. Perieanu, A. Reimers, O. Rieger, C. Scharf, P. Schleper, S. Schumann, J. Schwandt, J. Sonneveld, H. Stadie, G. Steinbrück, F.M. Stober, M. Stöver, B. Vormwald, I. Zoi

**Karlsruher Institut fuer Technologie, Karlsruhe, Germany**

M. Akbiyik, C. Barth, M. Baselga, S. Baur, E. Butz, R. Caspart, T. Chwalek, F. Colombo, W. De Boer, A. Dierlamm, K. El Morabit, N. Faltermann, B. Freund, M. Giffels, M.A. Harrendorf, F. Hartmann<sup>16</sup>, S.M. Heindl, U. Husemann, I. Katkov<sup>14</sup>, S. Kudella, S. Mitra, M.U. Mozer, Th. Müller, M. Musich, M. Plagge, G. Quast, K. Rabbertz,

M. Schröder, I. Shvetsov, H.J. Simonis, R. Ulrich, S. Wayand, M. Weber, T. Weiler, C. Wöhrmann, R. Wolf

**Institute of Nuclear and Particle Physics (INPP), NCSR Demokritos, Aghia Paraskevi, Greece**

G. Anagnostou, G. Daskalakis, T. Gerasim, A. Kyriakis, D. Loukas, G. Paspalaki

**National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece**

A. Agapitos, G. Karathanasis, P. Kontaxakis, A. Panagiotou, I. Papavergou, N. Saoulidou, K. Vellidis

**National Technical University of Athens, Athens, Greece**

K. Kousouris, I. Papakrivopoulos, G. Tsipolitis

**University of Ioánnina, Ioánnina, Greece**

I. Evangelou, C. Foudas, P. Gianneios, P. Katsoulis, P. Kokkas, S. Mallios, N. Manthos, I. Papadopoulos, E. Paradas, J. Strologas, F.A. Triantis, D. Tsitsonis

**MTA-ELTE Lendület CMS Particle and Nuclear Physics Group, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary**

M. Bartók<sup>20</sup>, M. Csanad, N. Filipovic, P. Major, M.I. Nagy, G. Pasztor, O. Surányi, G.I. Veres

**Wigner Research Centre for Physics, Budapest, Hungary**

G. Bencze, C. Hajdu, D. Horvath<sup>21</sup>, Á. Hunyadi, F. Sikler, T.Á. Vámi, V. Veszpremi, G. Vesztergombi<sup>†</sup>

**Institute of Nuclear Research ATOMKI, Debrecen, Hungary**

N. Beni, S. Czellar, J. Karancsi<sup>20</sup>, A. Makovec, J. Molnar, Z. Szillasi

**Institute of Physics, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary**

P. Raics, Z.L. Trocsanyi, B. Ujvari

**Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, India**

S. Choudhury, J.R. Komaragiri, P.C. Tiwari

**National Institute of Science Education and Research, HBNI, Bhubaneswar, India**

S. Bahinipati<sup>23</sup>, C. Kar, P. Mal, K. Mandal, A. Nayak<sup>24</sup>, S. Roy Chowdhury, D.K. Sahoo<sup>23</sup>, S.K. Swain

**Panjab University, Chandigarh, India**

S. Bansal, S.B. Beri, V. Bhatnagar, S. Chauhan, R. Chawla, N. Dhingra, R. Gupta, A. Kaur, M. Kaur, S. Kaur, P. Kumari, M. Lohan, M. Meena, A. Mehta, K. Sandeep, S. Sharma, J.B. Singh, A.K. Viridi, G. Walia

**University of Delhi, Delhi, India**

A. Bhardwaj, B.C. Choudhary, R.B. Garg, M. Gola, S. Keshri, Ashok Kumar, S. Malhotra, M. Naimuddin, P. Priyanka, K. Ranjan, Aashaq Shah, R. Sharma

**Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, HBNI, Kolkata, India**

R. Bhardwaj<sup>25</sup>, M. Bharti<sup>25</sup>, R. Bhattacharya, S. Bhattacharya, U. Bhawandeep<sup>25</sup>,  
 D. Bhowmik, S. Dey, S. Dutt<sup>25</sup>, S. Dutta, S. Ghosh, M. Maity<sup>26</sup>, K. Mondal, S. Nandan,  
 A. Purohit, P.K. Rout, A. Roy, G. Saha, S. Sarkar, T. Sarkar<sup>26</sup>, M. Sharan, B. Singh<sup>25</sup>,  
 S. Thakur<sup>25</sup>

**Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Madras, India**

P.K. Behera, A. Muhammad

**Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Mumbai, India**

R. Chudasama, D. Dutta, V. Jha, V. Kumar, D.K. Mishra, P.K. Netrakanti, L.M. Pant,  
 P. Shukla, P. Suggisetti

**Tata Institute of Fundamental Research-A, Mumbai, India**

T. Aziz, M.A. Bhat, S. Dugad, G.B. Mohanty, N. Sur, RavindraKumar Verma

**Tata Institute of Fundamental Research-B, Mumbai, India**

S. Banerjee, S. Bhattacharya, S. Chatterjee, P. Das, M. Guchait, Sa. Jain, S. Karmakar,  
 S. Kumar, G. Majumder, K. Mazumdar, N. Sahoo

**Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune, India**

S. Chauhan, S. Dube, V. Hegde, A. Kapoor, K. Kotheekar, S. Pandey, A. Rane, A. Rastogi,  
 S. Sharma

**Institute for Research in Fundamental Sciences (IPM), Tehran, Iran**

S. Chenarani<sup>27</sup>, E. Eskandari Tadavani, S.M. Etesami<sup>27</sup>, M. Khakzad, M. Mohammadi Na-  
 jafabadi, M. Naseri, F. Rezaei Hosseinabadi, B. Safarzadeh<sup>28</sup>, M. Zeinali

**University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland**

M. Felcini, M. Grunewald

**INFN Sezione di Bari<sup>a</sup>, Università di Bari<sup>b</sup>, Politecnico di Bari<sup>c</sup>, Bari, Italy**

M. Abbrescia<sup>a,b</sup>, C. Calabria<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Colaleo<sup>a</sup>, D. Creanza<sup>a,c</sup>, L. Cristella<sup>a,b</sup>, N. De Filippis<sup>a,c</sup>,  
 M. De Palma<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Di Florio<sup>a,b</sup>, F. Errico<sup>a,b</sup>, L. Fiore<sup>a</sup>, A. Gelmi<sup>a,b</sup>, G. Iaselli<sup>a,c</sup>, M. Ince<sup>a,b</sup>,  
 S. Lezki<sup>a,b</sup>, G. Maggi<sup>a,c</sup>, M. Maggi<sup>a</sup>, G. Miniello<sup>a,b</sup>, S. My<sup>a,b</sup>, S. Nuzzo<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Pompili<sup>a,b</sup>,  
 G. Pugliese<sup>a,c</sup>, R. Radogna<sup>a</sup>, A. Ranieri<sup>a</sup>, G. Selvaggi<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Sharma<sup>a</sup>, L. Silvestris<sup>a</sup>,  
 R. Venditti<sup>a</sup>, P. Verwilligen<sup>a</sup>

**INFN Sezione di Bologna<sup>a</sup>, Università di Bologna<sup>b</sup>, Bologna, Italy**

G. Abbiendi<sup>a</sup>, C. Battilana<sup>a,b</sup>, D. Bonacorsi<sup>a,b</sup>, L. Borgonovi<sup>a,b</sup>, S. Braibant-Giacomelli<sup>a,b</sup>,  
 R. Campanini<sup>a,b</sup>, P. Capiluppi<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Castro<sup>a,b</sup>, F.R. Cavallo<sup>a</sup>, S.S. Chhibra<sup>a,b</sup>,  
 G. Codispoti<sup>a,b</sup>, M. Cuffiani<sup>a,b</sup>, G.M. Dallavalle<sup>a</sup>, F. Fabbri<sup>a</sup>, A. Fanfani<sup>a,b</sup>, E. Fontanesi,  
 P. Giacomelli<sup>a</sup>, C. Grandi<sup>a</sup>, L. Guiducci<sup>a,b</sup>, F. Iemmi<sup>a,b</sup>, S. Lo Meo<sup>a,29</sup>, S. Marcellini<sup>a</sup>,  
 G. Masetti<sup>a</sup>, A. Montanari<sup>a</sup>, F.L. Navarria<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Perrotta<sup>a</sup>, F. Primavera<sup>a,b</sup>, A.M. Rossi<sup>a,b</sup>,  
 T. Rovelli<sup>a,b</sup>, G.P. Siroli<sup>a,b</sup>, N. Tosi<sup>a</sup>

**INFN Sezione di Catania<sup>a</sup>, Università di Catania<sup>b</sup>, Catania, Italy**

S. Albergo<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Di Mattia<sup>a</sup>, R. Potenza<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Tricomi<sup>a,b</sup>, C. Tuve<sup>a,b</sup>

**INFN Sezione di Firenze<sup>a</sup>, Università di Firenze<sup>b</sup>, Firenze, Italy**

G. Barbagli<sup>a</sup>, K. Chatterjee<sup>a,b</sup>, V. Ciulli<sup>a,b</sup>, C. Civinini<sup>a</sup>, R. D'Alessandro<sup>a,b</sup>, E. Focardi<sup>a,b</sup>, G. Latino, P. Lenzi<sup>a,b</sup>, M. Meschini<sup>a</sup>, S. Paoletti<sup>a</sup>, L. Russo<sup>a,30</sup>, G. Sguazzoni<sup>a</sup>, D. Strom<sup>a</sup>, L. Viliani<sup>a</sup>

**INFN Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati, Frascati, Italy**

L. Benussi, S. Bianco, F. Fabbri, D. Piccolo

**INFN Sezione di Genova<sup>a</sup>, Università di Genova<sup>b</sup>, Genova, Italy**

F. Ferro<sup>a</sup>, L. Panizzi<sup>a,b</sup>, R. Mulargia<sup>a,b</sup>, E. Robutti<sup>a</sup>, S. Tosi<sup>a,b</sup>

**INFN Sezione di Milano-Bicocca<sup>a</sup>, Università di Milano-Bicocca<sup>b</sup>, Milano, Italy**

A. Benaglia<sup>a</sup>, A. Beschi<sup>b</sup>, F. Brivio<sup>a,b</sup>, V. Ciriolo<sup>a,b,16</sup>, S. Di Guida<sup>a,b,16</sup>, M.E. Dinardo<sup>a,b</sup>, S. Fiorendi<sup>a,b</sup>, S. Gennai<sup>a</sup>, A. Ghezzi<sup>a,b</sup>, P. Govoni<sup>a,b</sup>, M. Malberti<sup>a,b</sup>, S. Malvezzi<sup>a</sup>, D. Menasce<sup>a</sup>, F. Monti, L. Moroni<sup>a</sup>, M. Paganoni<sup>a,b</sup>, D. Pedrini<sup>a</sup>, S. Ragazzi<sup>a,b</sup>, T. Tabarelli de Fatis<sup>a,b</sup>, D. Zuolo<sup>a,b</sup>

**INFN Sezione di Napoli<sup>a</sup>, Università di Napoli 'Federico II'<sup>b</sup>, Napoli, Italy, Università della Basilicata<sup>c</sup>, Potenza, Italy, Università G. Marconi<sup>d</sup>, Roma, Italy**

S. Buontempo<sup>a</sup>, N. Cavallo<sup>a,c</sup>, A. De Iorio<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Di Crescenzo<sup>a,b</sup>, F. Fabozzi<sup>a,c</sup>, F. Fienga<sup>a</sup>, G. Galati<sup>a</sup>, A.O.M. Iorio<sup>a,b</sup>, L. Lista<sup>a</sup>, S. Meola<sup>a,d,16</sup>, P. Paolucci<sup>a,16</sup>, C. Sciacca<sup>a,b</sup>, E. Voevodina<sup>a,b</sup>

**INFN Sezione di Padova<sup>a</sup>, Università di Padova<sup>b</sup>, Padova, Italy, Università di Trento<sup>c</sup>, Trento, Italy**

P. Azzi<sup>a</sup>, N. Bacchetta<sup>a</sup>, D. Bisello<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Boletti<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Bragagnolo, R. Carlin<sup>a,b</sup>, P. Checchia<sup>a</sup>, M. Dall'Osso<sup>a,b</sup>, P. De Castro Manzano<sup>a</sup>, T. Dorigo<sup>a</sup>, U. Dosselli<sup>a</sup>, F. Gasparini<sup>a,b</sup>, U. Gasparini<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Gozzelino<sup>a</sup>, S.Y. Hoh, S. Lacaprara<sup>a</sup>, P. Lujan, M. Margoni<sup>a,b</sup>, A.T. Meneguzzo<sup>a,b</sup>, J. Pazzini<sup>a,b</sup>, M. Presilla<sup>b</sup>, P. Ronchese<sup>a,b</sup>, R. Rossin<sup>a,b</sup>, F. Simonetto<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Tiko, E. Torassa<sup>a</sup>, M. Tosi<sup>a,b</sup>, M. Zanetti<sup>a,b</sup>, P. Zotto<sup>a,b</sup>, G. Zumerle<sup>a,b</sup>

**INFN Sezione di Pavia<sup>a</sup>, Università di Pavia<sup>b</sup>, Pavia, Italy**

A. Braghieri<sup>a</sup>, A. Magnani<sup>a</sup>, P. Montagna<sup>a,b</sup>, S.P. Ratti<sup>a,b</sup>, V. Re<sup>a</sup>, M. Ressegotti<sup>a,b</sup>, C. Riccardi<sup>a,b</sup>, P. Salvini<sup>a</sup>, I. Vai<sup>a,b</sup>, P. Vitulo<sup>a,b</sup>

**INFN Sezione di Perugia<sup>a</sup>, Università di Perugia<sup>b</sup>, Perugia, Italy**

M. Biasini<sup>a,b</sup>, G.M. Bilei<sup>a</sup>, C. Cecchi<sup>a,b</sup>, D. Ciangottini<sup>a,b</sup>, L. Fanò<sup>a,b</sup>, P. Lariccia<sup>a,b</sup>, R. Leonardi<sup>a,b</sup>, E. Manoni<sup>a</sup>, G. Mantovani<sup>a,b</sup>, V. Mariani<sup>a,b</sup>, M. Menichelli<sup>a</sup>, A. Rossi<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Santocchia<sup>a,b</sup>, D. Spiga<sup>a</sup>

**INFN Sezione di Pisa<sup>a</sup>, Università di Pisa<sup>b</sup>, Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa<sup>c</sup>, Pisa, Italy**

K. Androsov<sup>a</sup>, P. Azzurri<sup>a</sup>, G. Bagliesi<sup>a</sup>, L. Bianchini<sup>a</sup>, T. Boccali<sup>a</sup>, L. Borrello, R. Castaldi<sup>a</sup>, M.A. Ciocci<sup>a,b</sup>, R. Dell'Orso<sup>a</sup>, G. Fedi<sup>a</sup>, F. Fiori<sup>a,c</sup>, L. Giannini<sup>a,c</sup>, A. Giassi<sup>a</sup>, M.T. Grippo<sup>a</sup>, F. Ligabue<sup>a,c</sup>, E. Manca<sup>a,c</sup>, G. Mandorli<sup>a,c</sup>, A. Messineo<sup>a,b</sup>, F. Palla<sup>a</sup>, A. Rizzi<sup>a,b</sup>, G. Rolandi<sup>31</sup>, P. Spagnolo<sup>a</sup>, R. Tenchini<sup>a</sup>, G. Tonelli<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Venturi<sup>a</sup>, P.G. Verdini<sup>a</sup>

**INFN Sezione di Roma<sup>a</sup>, Sapienza Università di Roma<sup>b</sup>, Rome, Italy**

L. Barone<sup>a,b</sup>, F. Cavallari<sup>a</sup>, M. Cipriani<sup>a,b</sup>, D. Del Re<sup>a,b</sup>, E. Di Marco<sup>a,b</sup>, M. Diemoz<sup>a</sup>, S. Gelli<sup>a,b</sup>, E. Longo<sup>a,b</sup>, B. Marzocchi<sup>a,b</sup>, P. Meridiani<sup>a</sup>, G. Organtini<sup>a,b</sup>, F. Pandolfi<sup>a</sup>, R. Paramatti<sup>a,b</sup>, F. Preiato<sup>a,b</sup>, S. Rahatlou<sup>a,b</sup>, C. Rovelli<sup>a</sup>, F. Santanastasio<sup>a,b</sup>

**INFN Sezione di Torino<sup>a</sup>, Università di Torino<sup>b</sup>, Torino, Italy, Università del Piemonte Orientale<sup>c</sup>, Novara, Italy**

N. Amapane<sup>a,b</sup>, R. Arcidiacono<sup>a,c</sup>, S. Argiro<sup>a,b</sup>, M. Arneodo<sup>a,c</sup>, N. Bartosik<sup>a</sup>, R. Bellan<sup>a,b</sup>, C. Biino<sup>a</sup>, A. Cappati<sup>a,b</sup>, N. Cartiglia<sup>a</sup>, F. Cenna<sup>a,b</sup>, S. Cometti<sup>a</sup>, M. Costa<sup>a,b</sup>, R. Covarelli<sup>a,b</sup>, N. Demaria<sup>a</sup>, B. Kiani<sup>a,b</sup>, C. Mariotti<sup>a</sup>, S. Maselli<sup>a</sup>, E. Migliore<sup>a,b</sup>, V. Monaco<sup>a,b</sup>, E. Monteil<sup>a,b</sup>, M. Monteno<sup>a</sup>, M.M. Obertino<sup>a,b</sup>, L. Pacher<sup>a,b</sup>, N. Pastrone<sup>a</sup>, M. Pelliccioni<sup>a</sup>, G.L. Pinna Angioni<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Romero<sup>a,b</sup>, M. Ruspa<sup>a,c</sup>, R. Sacchi<sup>a,b</sup>, R. Salvatico<sup>a,b</sup>, K. Shchelina<sup>a,b</sup>, V. Sola<sup>a</sup>, A. Solano<sup>a,b</sup>, D. Soldi<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Staiano<sup>a</sup>

**INFN Sezione di Trieste<sup>a</sup>, Università di Trieste<sup>b</sup>, Trieste, Italy**

S. Belforte<sup>a</sup>, V. Candelise<sup>a,b</sup>, M. Casarsa<sup>a</sup>, F. Cossutti<sup>a</sup>, A. Da Rold<sup>a,b</sup>, G. Della Ricca<sup>a,b</sup>, F. Vazzoler<sup>a,b</sup>, A. Zanetti<sup>a</sup>

**Kyungpook National University, Daegu, Korea**

D.H. Kim, G.N. Kim, M.S. Kim, J. Lee, S.W. Lee, C.S. Moon, Y.D. Oh, S.I. Pak, S. Sekmen, D.C. Son, Y.C. Yang

**Chonnam National University, Institute for Universe and Elementary Particles, Kwangju, Korea**

H. Kim, D.H. Moon, G. Oh

**Hanyang University, Seoul, Korea**

B. Francois, J. Goh<sup>32</sup>, T.J. Kim

**Korea University, Seoul, Korea**

S. Cho, S. Choi, Y. Go, D. Gyun, S. Ha, B. Hong, Y. Jo, K. Lee, K.S. Lee, S. Lee, J. Lim, S.K. Park, Y. Roh

**Sejong University, Seoul, Korea**

H.S. Kim

**Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea**

J. Almond, J. Kim, J.S. Kim, H. Lee, K. Lee, S. Lee, K. Nam, S.B. Oh, B.C. Radburn-Smith, S.h. Seo, U.K. Yang, H.D. Yoo, G.B. Yu

**University of Seoul, Seoul, Korea**

D. Jeon, H. Kim, J.H. Kim, J.S.H. Lee, I.C. Park

**Sungkyunkwan University, Suwon, Korea**

Y. Choi, C. Hwang, J. Lee, I. Yu

**Riga Technical University, Riga, Latvia**

V. Veckalns<sup>33</sup>

**Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania**

V. Dudenas, A. Juodagalvis, J. Vaitkus

**National Centre for Particle Physics, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**Z.A. Ibrahim, M.A.B. Md Ali<sup>34</sup>, F. Mohamad Idris<sup>35</sup>, W.A.T. Wan Abdullah, M.N. Yusli, Z. Zolkapli**Universidad de Sonora (UNISON), Hermosillo, Mexico**

J.F. Benitez, A. Castaneda Hernandez, J.A. Murillo Quijada

**Centro de Investigacion y de Estudios Avanzados del IPN, Mexico City, Mexico**H. Castilla-Valdez, E. De La Cruz-Burelo, M.C. Duran-Osuna, I. Heredia-De La Cruz<sup>36</sup>, R. Lopez-Fernandez, J. Mejia Guisao, R.I. Rabadan-Trejo, M. Ramirez-Garcia, G. Ramirez-Sanchez, R. Reyes-Almanza, A. Sanchez-Hernandez**Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, Mexico**

S. Carrillo Moreno, C. Oropeza Barrera, F. Vazquez Valencia

**Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla, Puebla, Mexico**

J. Eysermans, I. Pedraza, H.A. Salazar Ibarguen, C. Uribe Estrada

**Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí, San Luis Potosí, Mexico**

A. Morelos Pineda

**University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand**

D. Krofcheck

**University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand**

S. Bheesette, P.H. Butler

**National Centre for Physics, Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan**

A. Ahmad, M. Ahmad, M.I. Asghar, Q. Hassan, H.R. Hoorani, W.A. Khan, M.A. Shah, M. Shoaib, M. Waqas

**National Centre for Nuclear Research, Swierk, Poland**

H. Bialkowska, M. Bluj, B. Boimska, T. Frueboes, M. Górski, M. Kazana, M. Szeleper, P. Traczyk, P. Zalewski

**Institute of Experimental Physics, Faculty of Physics, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland**K. Bunkowski, A. Byszuk<sup>37</sup>, K. Doroba, A. Kalinowski, M. Konecki, J. Krolikowski, M. Misiura, M. Olszewski, A. Pyskir, M. Walczak**Laboratório de Instrumentação e Física Experimental de Partículas, Lisboa, Portugal**

M. Araujo, P. Bargassa, C. Beirão Da Cruz E Silva, A. Di Francesco, P. Faccioli, B. Galinhas, M. Gallinaro, J. Hollar, N. Leonardo, J. Seixas, G. Strong, O. Toldaiev, J. Varela

**Joint Institute for Nuclear Research, Dubna, Russia**

S. Afanasiev, P. Bunin, M. Gavrilenko, I. Golutvin, I. Gorbunov, A. Kamenev, V. Karjavine, A. Lanev, A. Malakhov, V. Matveev<sup>38,39</sup>, P. Moisenz, V. Palichik, V. Perelygin, S. Shmatov, S. Shulha, N. Skatchkov, V. Smirnov, N. Voytishin, A. Zarubin

**Petersburg Nuclear Physics Institute, Gatchina (St. Petersburg), Russia**

V. Golovtsov, Y. Ivanov, V. Kim<sup>40</sup>, E. Kuznetsova<sup>41</sup>, P. Levchenko, V. Murzin, V. Oreshkin, I. Smirnov, D. Sosnov, V. Sulimov, L. Uvarov, S. Vavilov, A. Vorobyev

**Institute for Nuclear Research, Moscow, Russia**

Yu. Andreev, A. Dermenev, S. Gninenko, N. Golubev, A. Karneyeu, M. Kirsanov, N. Krasnikov, A. Pashenkov, A. Shabanov, D. Tlisov, A. Toropin

**Institute for Theoretical and Experimental Physics, Moscow, Russia**

V. Epshteyn, V. Gavrilov, N. Lychkovskaya, V. Popov, I. Pozdnyakov, G. Safronov, A. Spiridonov, A. Stepenov, V. Stolin, M. Toms, E. Vlasov, A. Zhokin

**Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, Moscow, Russia**

T. Aushev

**National Research Nuclear University 'Moscow Engineering Physics Institute' (MEPhI), Moscow, Russia**

M. Chadeeva<sup>42</sup>, D. Philippov, E. Popova, V. Rusinov

**P.N. Lebedev Physical Institute, Moscow, Russia**

V. Andreev, M. Azarkin, I. Dremin<sup>39</sup>, M. Kirakosyan, A. Terkulov

**Skobeltsyn Institute of Nuclear Physics, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia**

A. Baskakov, A. Belyaev, E. Boos, V. Bunichev, M. Dubinin<sup>43</sup>, L. Dudko, A. Ershov, V. Klyukhin, O. Kodolova, I. Lokhtin, S. Obraztsov, S. Petrushanko, V. Savrin

**Novosibirsk State University (NSU), Novosibirsk, Russia**

A. Barnyakov<sup>44</sup>, V. Blinov<sup>44</sup>, T. Dimova<sup>44</sup>, L. Kardapoltsev<sup>44</sup>, Y. Skovpen<sup>44</sup>

**Institute for High Energy Physics of National Research Centre 'Kurchatov Institute', Protvino, Russia**

I. Azhgirey, I. Bayshev, S. Bitioukov, V. Kachanov, A. Kalinin, D. Konstantinov, P. Mandrik, V. Petrov, R. Ryutin, S. Slabospitskii, A. Sobol, S. Troshin, N. Tyurin, A. Uzunian, A. Volkov

**National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University, Tomsk, Russia**

A. Babaev, S. Baidali, V. Okhotnikov

**University of Belgrade: Faculty of Physics and VINCA Institute of Nuclear Sciences**

P. Adzic<sup>45</sup>, P. Cirkovic, D. Devetak, M. Dordevic, P. Milenovic<sup>46</sup>, J. Milosevic



**Centro de Investigaciones Energéticas Medioambientales y Tecnológicas (CIEMAT), Madrid, Spain**

J. Alcaraz Maestre, A. Álvarez Fernández, I. Bachiller, M. Barrio Luna, J.A. Brochero Cifuentes, M. Cerrada, N. Colino, B. De La Cruz, A. Delgado Peris, C. Fernandez Bedoya, J.P. Fernández Ramos, J. Flix, M.C. Fouz, O. Gonzalez Lopez, S. Goy Lopez, J.M. Hernandez, M.I. Josa, D. Moran, A. Pérez-Calero Yzquierdo, J. Puerta Pelayo, I. Redondo, L. Romero, S. Sánchez Navas, M.S. Soares, A. Triossi

**Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid, Spain**

C. Albajar, J.F. de Trocóniz, Y. Jiang

**Universidad de Oviedo, Oviedo, Spain**

J. Cuevas, C. Erice, J. Fernandez Menendez, S. Folgueras, I. Gonzalez Caballero, J.R. González Fernández, E. Palencia Cortezon, V. Rodríguez Bouza, S. Sanchez Cruz, J.M. Vizán García

**Instituto de Física de Cantabria (IFCA), CSIC-Universidad de Cantabria, Santander, Spain**

I.J. Cabrillo, A. Calderon, B. Chazin Quero, J. Duarte Campderros, M. Fernandez, P.J. Fernández Manteca, A. García Alonso, J. Garcia-Ferrero, G. Gomez, A. Lopez Virto, J. Marco, C. Martinez Rivero, P. Martinez Ruiz del Arbol, F. Matorras, J. Piedra Gomez, C. Prieels, T. Rodrigo, A. Ruiz-Jimeno, L. Scodellaro, N. Trevisani, I. Vila, R. Villar Cortabitarte

**University of Ruhuna, Department of Physics, Matara, Sri Lanka**

N. Wickramage

**CERN, European Organization for Nuclear Research, Geneva, Switzerland**

D. Abbaneo, B. Akgun, E. Auffray, G. Auzinger, P. Baillon, A.H. Ball, D. Barney, J. Bendavid, M. Bianco, A. Bocci, C. Botta, E. Brondolin, T. Camporesi, M. Cepeda, G. Cerminara, E. Chapon, Y. Chen, G. Cucciati, D. d'Enterria, A. Dabrowski, N. Daci, V. Daponte, A. David, A. De Roeck, N. Deelen, M. Dobson, M. Dünser, N. Dupont, A. Elliott-Peisert, F. Fallavollita<sup>47</sup>, D. Fasanella, G. Franzoni, J. Fulcher, W. Funk, D. Gigi, A. Gilbert, K. Gill, F. Glege, M. Gruchala, M. Guilbaud, D. Gulhan, J. Hegeman, C. Heidegger, Y. Iiyama, V. Innocente, G.M. Innocenti, A. Jafari, P. Janot, O. Karacheban<sup>19</sup>, J. Kieseler, A. Kornmayer, M. Krammer<sup>1</sup>, C. Lange, P. Lecoq, C. Lourenço, L. Malgeri, M. Mannelli, A. Massironi, F. Meijers, J.A. Merlin, S. Mersi, E. Meschi, F. Moortgat, M. Mulders, J. Ngadiuba, S. Nourbakhsh, S. Orfanelli, L. Orsini, F. Pantaleo<sup>16</sup>, L. Pape, E. Perez, M. Peruzzi, A. Petrilli, G. Petrucciani, A. Pfeiffer, M. Pierini, F.M. Pitters, D. Rabady, A. Racz, M. Rovere, H. Sakulin, C. Schäfer, C. Schwick, M. Selvaggi, A. Sharma, P. Silva, P. Sphicas<sup>48</sup>, A. Stakia, J. Steggemann, D. Treille, A. Tsirou, A. Vartak, M. Verzetti, W.D. Zeuner

**Paul Scherrer Institut, Villigen, Switzerland**

L. Caminada<sup>49</sup>, K. Deiters, W. Erdmann, R. Horisberger, Q. Ingram, H.C. Kaestli, D. Kotlinski, U. Langenegger, T. Rohe, S.A. Wiederkehr

**ETH Zurich — Institute for Particle Physics and Astrophysics (IPA), Zurich, Switzerland**

M. Backhaus, L. Bäni, P. Berger, N. Chernyavskaya, G. Dissertori, M. Dittmar, M. Donegà, C. Dorfer, T.A. Gómez Espinosa, C. Grab, D. Hits, T. Klijnsma, W. Luster, R.A. Manzoni, M. Marionneau, M.T. Meinhard, F. Micheli, P. Musella, F. Nessi-Tedaldi, F. Pauss, G. Perrin, L. Perrozzi, S. Pigazzini, M. Reichmann, C. Reissel, D. Ruini, D.A. Sanz Becerra, M. Schönenberger, L. Shchutska, V.R. Tavolaro, K. Theofilatos, M.L. Vesterbacka Olsson, R. Wallny, D.H. Zhu

**Universität Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland**

T.K. Aarrestad, C. Amsler<sup>50</sup>, D. Brzhechko, M.F. Canelli, A. De Cosa, R. Del Burgo, S. Donato, C. Galloni, T. Hreus, B. Kilminster, S. Leontsinis, V.M. Mikuni, I. Neutelings, G. Rauco, P. Robmann, D. Salerno, K. Schweiger, C. Seitz, Y. Takahashi, S. Wertz, A. Zucchetta

**National Central University, Chung-Li, Taiwan**

T.H. Doan, R. Khurana, C.M. Kuo, W. Lin, S.S. Yu

**National Taiwan University (NTU), Taipei, Taiwan**

P. Chang, Y. Chao, K.F. Chen, P.H. Chen, W.-S. Hou, Y.F. Liu, R.-S. Lu, E. Paganis, A. Psallidas, A. Steen

**Chulalongkorn University, Faculty of Science, Department of Physics, Bangkok, Thailand**

B. Asavapibhop, N. Srimanobhas, N. Suwonjandee

**Çukurova University, Physics Department, Science and Art Faculty, Adana, Turkey**

A. Bat, F. Boran, S. Cerci<sup>51</sup>, S. Damarseckin, Z.S. Demiroglu, F. Dolek, C. Dozen, I. Dumanoglu, G. Gokbulut, Y. Guler, E. Gurpinar, I. Hos<sup>52</sup>, C. Isik, E.E. Kangal<sup>53</sup>, O. Kara, A. Kayis Topaksu, U. Kiminsu, M. Oglakci, G. Onengut, K. Ozdemir<sup>54</sup>, S. Ozturk<sup>55</sup>, D. Sunar Cerci<sup>51</sup>, B. Tali<sup>51</sup>, U.G. Tok, S. Turkcapar, I.S. Zorbakir, C. Zorbilmez

**Middle East Technical University, Physics Department, Ankara, Turkey**

B. Isildak<sup>56</sup>, G. Karapinar<sup>57</sup>, M. Yalvac, M. Zeyrek

**Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey**

I.O. Atakisi, E. Gülmez, M. Kaya<sup>58</sup>, O. Kaya<sup>59</sup>, Ö. Özçelik, S. Ozkorucuklu<sup>60</sup>, S. Tekten, E.A. Yetkin<sup>61</sup>

**Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey**

M.N. Agaras, A. Cakir, K. Cankocak, Y. Komurcu, S. Sen<sup>62</sup>

**Institute for Scintillation Materials of National Academy of Science of Ukraine, Kharkov, Ukraine**

B. Grynyov

**National Scientific Center, Kharkov Institute of Physics and Technology,  
Kharkov, Ukraine**

L. Levchuk

**University of Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom**

F. Ball, J.J. Brooke, D. Burns, E. Clement, D. Cussans, O. Davignon, H. Flacher, J. Goldstein, G.P. Heath, H.F. Heath, L. Kreczko, D.M. Newbold<sup>63</sup>, S. Paramesvaran, B. Penning, T. Sakuma, D. Smith, V.J. Smith, J. Taylor, A. Titterton

**Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot, United Kingdom**

K.W. Bell, A. Belyaev<sup>64</sup>, C. Brew, R.M. Brown, D. Cieri, D.J.A. Cockerill, J.A. Coughlan, K. Harder, S. Harper, J. Linacre, K. Manolopoulos, E. Olaiya, D. Petyt, T. Reis, T. Schuh, C.H. Shepherd-Themistocleous, A. Thea, I.R. Tomalin, T. Williams, W.J. Womersley

**Imperial College, London, United Kingdom**

R. Bainbridge, P. Bloch, J. Borg, S. Breeze, O. Buchmuller, A. Bundock, D. Colling, P. Dauncey, G. Davies, M. Della Negra, R. Di Maria, P. Everaerts, G. Hall, G. Iles, T. James, M. Komm, C. Laner, L. Lyons, A.-M. Magnan, S. Malik, A. Martelli, J. Nash<sup>65</sup>, A. Nikitenko<sup>7</sup>, V. Palladino, M. Pesaresi, D.M. Raymond, A. Richards, A. Rose, E. Scott, C. Seez, A. Shtipliyski, G. Singh, M. Stoye, T. Strebler, S. Summers, A. Tapper, K. Uchida, T. Virdee<sup>16</sup>, N. Wardle, D. Winterbottom, J. Wright, S.C. Zenz

**Brunel University, Uxbridge, United Kingdom**

J.E. Cole, P.R. Hobson, A. Khan, P. Kyberd, C.K. Mackay, A. Morton, I.D. Reid, L. Teodorescu, S. Zahid

**Baylor University, Waco, U.S.A.**

K. Call, J. Dittmann, K. Hatakeyama, H. Liu, C. Madrid, B. McMaster, N. Pastika, C. Smith

**Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, U.S.A.**

R. Bartek, A. Dominguez

**The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, U.S.A.**

A. Buccilli, O. Charaf, S.I. Cooper, C. Henderson, P. Rumerio, C. West

**Boston University, Boston, U.S.A.**

D. Arcaro, T. Bose, Z. Demiragli, D. Gastler, S. Girgis, D. Pinna, C. Richardson, J. Rohlf, D. Sperka, I. Suarez, L. Sulak, D. Zou

**Brown University, Providence, U.S.A.**

G. Benelli, B. Burkle, X. Coubez, D. Cutts, M. Hadley, J. Hakala, U. Heintz, J.M. Hogan<sup>66</sup>, K.H.M. Kwok, E. Laird, G. Landsberg, J. Lee, Z. Mao, M. Narain, S. Sagir<sup>67</sup>, R. Syarif, E. Usai, D. Yu

**University of California, Davis, Davis, U.S.A.**

R. Band, C. Brainerd, R. Breedon, D. Burns, M. Calderon De La Barca Sanchez, M. Chertok, J. Conway, R. Conway, P.T. Cox, R. Erbacher, C. Flores, G. Funk, J. Gunion,

W. Ko, O. Kukral, R. Lander, M. Mulhearn, D. Pellett, J. Pilot, S. Shalhout, M. Shi, D. Stolp, D. Taylor, K. Tos, M. Tripathi, Z. Wang, F. Zhang

**University of California, Los Angeles, U.S.A.**

M. Bachtis, C. Bravo, R. Cousins, A. Dasgupta, S. Erhan, A. Florent, J. Hauser, M. Ignatenko, N. Mccoll, S. Regnard, D. Saltzberg, C. Schnaible, V. Valuev

**University of California, Riverside, Riverside, U.S.A.**

E. Bouvier, K. Burt, R. Clare, J.W. Gary, S.M.A. Ghiasi Shirazi, G. Hanson, G. Karapostoli, E. Kennedy, F. Lacroix, O.R. Long, M. Olmedo Negrete, M.I. Paneva, W. Si, L. Wang, H. Wei, S. Wimpenny, B.R. Yates

**University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, U.S.A.**

J.G. Branson, P. Chang, S. Cittolin, M. Derdzinski, R. Gerosa, D. Gilbert, B. Hashemi, A. Holzner, D. Klein, G. Kole, V. Krutelyov, J. Letts, M. Masciovecchio, S. May, D. Olivito, S. Padhi, M. Pieri, V. Sharma, M. Tadel, J. Wood, F. Würthwein, A. Yagil, G. Zevi Della Porta

**University of California, Santa Barbara — Department of Physics, Santa Barbara, U.S.A.**

N. Amin, R. Bhandari, C. Campagnari, M. Citron, V. Dutta, M. Franco Sevilla, L. Gouskos, R. Heller, J. Incandela, H. Mei, A. Ovcharova, H. Qu, J. Richman, D. Stuart, S. Wang, J. Yoo

**California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, U.S.A.**

D. Anderson, A. Bornheim, J.M. Lawhorn, N. Lu, H.B. Newman, T.Q. Nguyen, J. Pata, M. Spiropulu, J.R. Vlimant, R. Wilkinson, S. Xie, Z. Zhang, R.Y. Zhu

**Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, U.S.A.**

M.B. Andrews, T. Ferguson, T. Mudholkar, M. Paulini, M. Sun, I. Vorobiev, M. Weinberg

**University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, U.S.A.**

J.P. Cumalat, W.T. Ford, F. Jensen, A. Johnson, E. MacDonald, T. Mulholland, R. Patel, A. Perloff, K. Stenson, K.A. Ulmer, S.R. Wagner

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J. Alexander, J. Chaves, Y. Cheng, J. Chu, A. Datta, K. Mcdermott, N. Mirman, J.R. Patterson, D. Quach, A. Rinkevicius, A. Ryd, L. Skinnari, L. Soffi, S.M. Tan, Z. Tao, J. Thom, J. Tucker, P. Wittich, M. Zientek

**Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Batavia, U.S.A.**

S. Abdullin, M. Albrow, M. Alyari, G. Apollinari, A. Apresyan, A. Apyan, S. Banerjee, L.A.T. Bauerdick, A. Beretvas, J. Berryhill, P.C. Bhat, K. Burkett, J.N. Butler, A. Canepa, G.B. Cerati, H.W.K. Cheung, F. Chlebana, M. Cremonesi, J. Duarte, V.D. Elvira, J. Freeman, Z. Gecse, E. Gottschalk, L. Gray, D. Green, S. Grünendahl, O. Gutsche, J. Hanlon, R.M. Harris, S. Hasegawa, J. Hirschauer, Z. Hu, B. Jayatilaka, S. Jindariani, M. Johnson, U. Joshi, B. Klima, M.J. Kortelainen, B. Kreis, S. Lammel, D. Lincoln, R. Lipton, M. Liu, T. Liu, J. Lykken, K. Maeshima, J.M. Marraffino, D. Mason, P. McBride,

P. Merkel, S. Mrenna, S. Nahn, V. O'Dell, K. Pedro, C. Pena, O. Prokofyev, G. Rakness, F. Ravera, A. Reinsvold, L. Ristori, A. Savoy-Navarro<sup>68</sup>, B. Schneider, E. Sexton-Kennedy, A. Soha, W.J. Spalding, L. Spiegel, S. Stoynev, J. Strait, N. Strobbe, L. Taylor, S. Tkaczyk, N.V. Tran, L. Uplegger, E.W. Vaandering, C. Vernieri, M. Verzocchi, R. Vidal, M. Wang, H.A. Weber

**University of Florida, Gainesville, U.S.A.**

D. Acosta, P. Avery, P. Bortignon, D. Bourilkov, A. Brinkerhoff, L. Cadamuro, A. Carnes, D. Curry, R.D. Field, S.V. Gleyzer, B.M. Joshi, J. Konigsberg, A. Korytov, K.H. Lo, P. Ma, K. Matchev, N. Menendez, G. Mitselmakher, D. Rosenzweig, K. Shi, J. Wang, S. Wang, X. Zuo

**Florida International University, Miami, U.S.A.**

Y.R. Joshi, S. Linn

**Florida State University, Tallahassee, U.S.A.**

A. Ackert, T. Adams, A. Askew, S. Hagopian, V. Hagopian, K.F. Johnson, T. Kolberg, G. Martinez, T. Perry, H. Prosper, A. Saha, C. Schiber, R. Yohay

**Florida Institute of Technology, Melbourne, U.S.A.**

M.M. Baarmand, V. Bhopatkar, S. Colafranceschi, M. Hohlmann, D. Noonan, M. Rahmani, T. Roy, M. Saunders, F. Yumiceva

**University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), Chicago, U.S.A.**

M.R. Adams, L. Apanasevich, D. Berry, R.R. Betts, R. Cavanaugh, X. Chen, S. Dittmer, O. Evdokimov, C.E. Gerber, D.A. Hangal, D.J. Hofman, K. Jung, J. Kamin, C. Mills, M.B. Tonjes, N. Varelas, H. Wang, X. Wang, Z. Wu, J. Zhang

**The University of Iowa, Iowa City, U.S.A.**

M. Alhusseini, B. Bilki<sup>69</sup>, W. Clarida, K. Dilsiz<sup>70</sup>, S. Durgut, R.P. Gandrajula, M. Haytmyradov, V. Khristenko, J.-P. Merlo, A. Mestvirishvili, A. Moeller, J. Nachtman, H. Ogul<sup>71</sup>, Y. Onel, F. Ozok<sup>72</sup>, A. Penzo, C. Snyder, E. Tiras, J. Wetzel

**Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, U.S.A.**

B. Blumenfeld, A. Cocoros, N. Eminizer, D. Fehling, L. Feng, A.V. Gritsan, W.T. Hung, P. Maksimovic, J. Roskes, U. Sarica, M. Swartz, M. Xiao

**The University of Kansas, Lawrence, U.S.A.**

A. Al-bataineh, P. Baringer, A. Bean, S. Boren, J. Bowen, A. Bylinkin, J. Castle, S. Khalil, A. Kropivnitskaya, D. Majumder, W. Mcbrayer, M. Murray, C. Rogan, S. Sanders, E. Schmitz, J.D. Tapia Takaki, Q. Wang

**Kansas State University, Manhattan, U.S.A.**

S. Duric, A. Ivanov, K. Kaadze, D. Kim, Y. Maravin, D.R. Mendis, T. Mitchell, A. Modak, A. Mohammadi

**Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Livermore, U.S.A.**

F. Rebassoo, D. Wright

**University of Maryland, College Park, U.S.A.**

A. Baden, O. Baron, A. Belloni, S.C. Eno, Y. Feng, C. Ferraioli, N.J. Hadley, S. Jabeen, G.Y. Jeng, R.G. Kellogg, J. Kunkle, A.C. Mignerey, S. Nabili, F. Ricci-Tam, M. Seidel, Y.H. Shin, A. Skuja, S.C. Tonwar, K. Wong

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, U.S.A.**

D. Abercrombie, B. Allen, V. Azzolini, A. Baty, R. Bi, S. Brandt, W. Busza, I.A. Cali, M. D'Alfonso, G. Gomez Ceballos, M. Goncharov, P. Harris, D. Hsu, M. Hu, M. Klute, D. Kovalskyi, Y.-J. Lee, P.D. Luckey, B. Maier, A.C. Marini, C. McGinn, C. Mironov, S. Narayanan, X. Niu, C. Paus, D. Rankin, C. Roland, G. Roland, Z. Shi, G.S.F. Stephans, K. Sumorok, K. Tatar, D. Velicanu, J. Wang, T.W. Wang, B. Wyslouch

**University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, U.S.A.**

A.C. Benvenuti<sup>†</sup>, R.M. Chatterjee, A. Evans, P. Hansen, J. Hiltbrand, Sh. Jain, S. Kalafut, M. Krohn, Y. Kubota, Z. Lesko, J. Mans, R. Rusack, M.A. Wadud

**University of Mississippi, Oxford, U.S.A.**

J.G. Acosta, S. Oliveros

**University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, U.S.A.**

E. Avdeeva, K. Bloom, D.R. Claes, C. Fangmeier, F. Golf, R. Gonzalez Suarez, R. Kamalieddin, I. Kravchenko, J. Monroy, J.E. Siado, G.R. Snow, B. Stieger

**State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, U.S.A.**

A. Godshalk, C. Harrington, I. Iashvili, A. Kharchilava, C. Mclean, D. Nguyen, A. Parker, S. Rappoccio, B. Roobahani

**Northeastern University, Boston, U.S.A.**

G. Alverson, E. Barberis, C. Freer, Y. Haddad, A. Hortiangtham, G. Madigan, D.M. Morse, T. Orimoto, A. Tishelman-charny, T. Wamorkar, B. Wang, A. Wisecarver, D. Wood

**Northwestern University, Evanston, U.S.A.**

S. Bhattacharya, J. Bueghly, T. Gunter, K.A. Hahn, N. Odell, M.H. Schmitt, K. Sung, M. Trovato, M. Velasco

**University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, U.S.A.**

R. Bucci, N. Dev, R. Goldouzian, M. Hildreth, K. Hurtado Anampa, C. Jessop, D.J. Karmgard, K. Lannon, W. Li, N. Loukas, N. Marinelli, F. Meng, C. Mueller, Y. Musienko<sup>38</sup>, M. Planer, R. Ruchti, P. Siddireddy, G. Smith, S. Taroni, M. Wayne, A. Wightman, M. Wolf, A. Woodard

**The Ohio State University, Columbus, U.S.A.**

J. Alimena, L. Antonelli, B. Bylsma, L.S. Durkin, S. Flowers, B. Francis, C. Hill, W. Ji, A. Lefeld, T.Y. Ling, W. Luo, B.L. Winer

**Princeton University, Princeton, U.S.A.**

S. Cooperstein, G. Dezoort, P. Elmer, J. Hardenbrook, N. Haubrich, S. Higginbotham, A. Kalogeropoulos, S. Kwan, D. Lange, M.T. Lucchini, J. Luo, D. Marlow, K. Mei, I. Ojalvo, J. Olsen, C. Palmer, P. Piroué, J. Salfeld-Nebgen, D. Stickland, C. Tully

**University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez, U.S.A.**

S. Malik, S. Norberg

**Purdue University, West Lafayette, U.S.A.**

A. Barker, V.E. Barnes, S. Das, L. Gutay, M. Jones, A.W. Jung, A. Khatiwada, B. Mahakud, D.H. Miller, N. Neumeister, C.C. Peng, S. Piperov, H. Qiu, J.F. Schulte, J. Sun, F. Wang, R. Xiao, W. Xie

**Purdue University Northwest, Hammond, U.S.A.**

T. Cheng, J. Dolen, N. Parashar

**Rice University, Houston, U.S.A.**

Z. Chen, K.M. Ecklund, S. Freed, F.J.M. Geurts, M. Kilpatrick, Arun Kumar, W. Li, B.P. Padley, R. Redjimi, J. Roberts, J. Rorie, W. Shi, Z. Tu, A. Zhang

**University of Rochester, Rochester, U.S.A.**

A. Bodek, P. de Barbaro, R. Demina, Y.t. Duh, J.L. Dulemba, C. Fallon, T. Ferbel, M. Galanti, A. Garcia-Bellido, J. Han, O. Hindrichs, A. Khukhunaishvili, E. Ranken, P. Tan, R. Taus

**Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Piscataway, U.S.A.**

B. Chiarito, J.P. Chou, Y. Gershtein, E. Halkiadakis, A. Hart, M. Heindl, E. Hughes, S. Kaplan, R. Kunnawalkam Elayavalli, S. Kyriacou, I. Laflotte, A. Lath, R. Montalvo, K. Nash, M. Osherson, H. Saka, S. Salur, S. Schnetzer, D. Sheffield, S. Somalwar, R. Stone, S. Thomas, P. Thomassen

**University of Tennessee, Knoxville, U.S.A.**

H. Acharya, A.G. Delannoy, J. Heideman, G. Riley, S. Spanier

**Texas A&M University, College Station, U.S.A.**

O. Bouhali<sup>73</sup>, A. Celik, M. Dalchenko, M. De Mattia, A. Delgado, S. Dildick, R. Eusebi, J. Gilmore, T. Huang, T. Kamon<sup>74</sup>, S. Luo, D. Marley, R. Mueller, D. Overton, L. Perniè, D. Rathjens, A. Safonov

**Texas Tech University, Lubbock, U.S.A.**

N. Akchurin, J. Damgov, F. De Guio, P.R. Duderov, S. Kunori, K. Lamichhane, S.W. Lee, T. Mengke, S. Muthumuni, T. Peltola, S. Undleeb, I. Volobouev, Z. Wang, A. Whitbeck

**Vanderbilt University, Nashville, U.S.A.**

S. Greene, A. Gurrola, R. Janjam, W. Johns, C. Maguire, A. Melo, H. Ni, K. Padeken, F. Romeo, P. Sheldon, S. Tuo, J. Velkovska, M. Verweij, Q. Xu

**University of Virginia, Charlottesville, U.S.A.**

M.W. Arenton, P. Barria, B. Cox, R. Hirosky, M. Joyce, A. Ledovskoy, H. Li, C. Neu, Y. Wang, E. Wolfe, F. Xia

**Wayne State University, Detroit, U.S.A.**

R. Harr, P.E. Karchin, N. Poudyal, J. Sturdy, P. Thapa, S. Zaleski

**University of Wisconsin — Madison, Madison, WI, U.S.A.**

J. Buchanan, C. Caillol, D. Carlsmith, S. Dasu, I. De Bruyn, L. Dodd, B. Gomber<sup>75</sup>,  
M. Grothe, M. Herndon, A. Hervé, U. Hussain, P. Klabbers, A. Lanaro, K. Long,  
R. Loveless, T. Ruggles, A. Savin, V. Sharma, N. Smith, W.H. Smith, N. Woods

†: Deceased

- 1: Also at Vienna University of Technology, Vienna, Austria
- 2: Also at IRFU, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay, Gif-sur-Yvette, France
- 3: Also at Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, Brazil
- 4: Also at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil
- 5: Also at Université Libre de Bruxelles, Bruxelles, Belgium
- 6: Also at University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China
- 7: Also at Institute for Theoretical and Experimental Physics, Moscow, Russia
- 8: Also at Joint Institute for Nuclear Research, Dubna, Russia
- 9: Also at Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt
- 10: Now at Zewail City of Science and Technology, Zewail, Egypt
- 11: Now at British University in Egypt, Cairo, Egypt
- 12: Also at Department of Physics, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
- 13: Also at Université de Haute Alsace, Mulhouse, France
- 14: Also at Skobeltsyn Institute of Nuclear Physics, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia
- 15: Also at Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia
- 16: Also at CERN, European Organization for Nuclear Research, Geneva, Switzerland
- 17: Also at RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut A, Aachen, Germany
- 18: Also at University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany
- 19: Also at Brandenburg University of Technology, Cottbus, Germany
- 20: Also at Institute of Physics, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary
- 21: Also at Institute of Nuclear Research ATOMKI, Debrecen, Hungary
- 22: Also at MTA-ELTE Lendület CMS Particle and Nuclear Physics Group, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary
- 23: Also at Indian Institute of Technology Bhubaneswar, Bhubaneswar, India
- 24: Also at Institute of Physics, Bhubaneswar, India
- 25: Also at Shoolini University, Solan, India
- 26: Also at University of Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, India
- 27: Also at Isfahan University of Technology, Isfahan, Iran
- 28: Also at Plasma Physics Research Center, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
- 29: Also at ITALIAN NATIONAL AGENCY FOR NEW TECHNOLOGIES, ENERGY AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, Bologna, Italy
- 30: Also at Università degli Studi di Siena, Siena, Italy
- 31: Also at Scuola Normale e Sezione dell'INFN, Pisa, Italy
- 32: Also at Kyung Hee University, Department of Physics, Seoul, Korea
- 33: Also at Riga Technical University, Riga, Latvia
- 34: Also at International Islamic University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 35: Also at Malaysian Nuclear Agency, MOSTI, Kajang, Malaysia
- 36: Also at Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología, Mexico City, Mexico
- 37: Also at Warsaw University of Technology, Institute of Electronic Systems, Warsaw, Poland
- 38: Also at Institute for Nuclear Research, Moscow, Russia



- 39: Now at National Research Nuclear University 'Moscow Engineering Physics Institute' (MEPhI), Moscow, Russia
- 40: Also at St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University, St. Petersburg, Russia
- 41: Also at University of Florida, Gainesville, U.S.A.
- 42: Also at P.N. Lebedev Physical Institute, Moscow, Russia
- 43: Also at California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, U.S.A.
- 44: Also at Budker Institute of Nuclear Physics, Novosibirsk, Russia
- 45: Also at Faculty of Physics, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia
- 46: Also at University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia
- 47: Also at INFN Sezione di Pavia<sup>a</sup>, Università di Pavia<sup>b</sup>, Pavia, Italy
- 48: Also at National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece
- 49: Also at Universität Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland
- 50: Also at Stefan Meyer Institute for Subatomic Physics (SMI), Vienna, Austria
- 51: Also at Adiyaman University, Adiyaman, Turkey
- 52: Also at Istanbul Aydin University, Istanbul, Turkey
- 53: Also at Mersin University, Mersin, Turkey
- 54: Also at Piri Reis University, Istanbul, Turkey
- 55: Also at Gaziosmanpasa University, Tokat, Turkey
- 56: Also at Ozyegin University, Istanbul, Turkey
- 57: Also at Izmir Institute of Technology, Izmir, Turkey
- 58: Also at Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey
- 59: Also at Kafkas University, Kars, Turkey
- 60: Also at Istanbul University, Istanbul, Turkey
- 61: Also at Istanbul Bilgi University, Istanbul, Turkey
- 62: Also at Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey
- 63: Also at Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot, United Kingdom
- 64: Also at School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom
- 65: Also at Monash University, Faculty of Science, Clayton, Australia
- 66: Also at Bethel University, St. Paul, U.S.A.
- 67: Also at Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, Karaman, Turkey
- 68: Also at Purdue University, West Lafayette, U.S.A.
- 69: Also at Beykent University, Istanbul, Turkey
- 70: Also at Bingol University, Bingol, Turkey
- 71: Also at Sinop University, Sinop, Turkey
- 72: Also at Mimar Sinan University, Istanbul, Istanbul, Turkey
- 73: Also at Texas A&M University at Qatar, Doha, Qatar
- 74: Also at Kyungpook National University, Daegu, Korea
- 75: Also at University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India