

HoustonGrandOpera



**For Immediate Release:** February 08, 2008

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## HOUSTON GRAND OPERA ANNOUNCES 2008-09 SEASON

### Highlights:

Nexus Initiative to Bring New Audiences to HGO  
HGO Chorus to Star in a New Work Created for Them  
World Premiere of André Previn's *Brief Encounter*

### Mainstage Season:

Mascagni: *Cavalleria rusticana* / Leoncavallo: *Pagliacci*  
Berlioz: *Beatrice and Benedict*  
Britten: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (new production)  
Various Composers: *Chorus!* (a newly conceived work)  
Verdi: *Rigoletto*  
Previn: *Brief Encounter* (world premiere)

(HOUSTON, TX – February 8, 2008) — Houston Grand Opera General Director and CEO **Anthony Freud**, OBE, today announced details of the company's 2008–09 season, which runs from October 17, 2008, to May 9, 2009, with thirty-four performances of six operas. “Our 54<sup>th</sup> season offers a particularly appealing combination of established favorites, rarely performed masterpieces and new works,” said Freud. “We are excited to bring a number of artists to Houston for the first time, and to continue our tradition of excellence and innovation with three new productions, including a new opera by André Previn.”

“In order to be accessible to the whole community, we must make ourselves affordable,” Freud said. “For that reason we have created a radical new audience development program, the **Nexus Initiative**.” Funded by a consortium of Houston's visionary corporate leaders, Nexus provides underwriting for selected subscription packages, discounted group tickets for senior and

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student groups, and special ten-dollar tickets for Nexus performances. The Nexus Initiative has received leadership support from **Anadarko Petroleum Corporation**. James T. Hackett, President, Chairman and CEO of Anadarko Petroleum Corporation and Chairman Emeritus of the Houston Grand Opera Association, is a driving force behind this ground-breaking initiative. "Anadarko is proud to have been part of the Nexus Initiative since its inception," said Hackett. "Arts and cultural activities improve the quality of life for everyone, and we are happy to participate in a program that makes it possible for all Houstonians to experience the magic of live performances."

"It is always exciting to introduce new artists to Houston's opera audience," stated Freud, who noted that HGO's 2008–09 season brings several artists to the U.S. for the first time. The company's production of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will feature the U.S. operatic debuts of soprano **Katie van Kooten** singing Helena and bass-baritone **Matthew Rose** as Bottom. The opera will also feature the HGO debuts of **Iestyn Davies** (Oberon) and **Peter Wedd** (Flute). The fall repertory features the HGO debuts of soprano **Ailish Tynan**, tenor **Brandon Jovanovich** and baritones **Charles Taylor** and **Donald Maxwell**. A number of beloved artists return to Houston, including **Vladimir Galouzine** (Canio in Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*), **Dolora Zajick** (Santuzza in Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*) and HGO Studio alumna **Joyce DiDonato**, who sings her first Beatrice in Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict*. **Laura Claycomb** returns to sing Tytania in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the spring, tenor **Eric Cutler** and bass **Andrea Silvestrelli**, both seen at HGO in the 07–08 season, return for Verdi's *Rigoletto* and **Elizabeth Futral** and baritone **Nathan Gunn** return to HGO in the world premiere of *Brief Encounter*, a new opera by André Previn. In addition to DiDonato, other returning HGO Studio alumni will also perform important roles next season: **Ana María Martínez** (Nedda in *Pagliacci*), **Scott Hendricks** (singing Silvio in *Pagliacci* as well as his first *Rigoletto*), **Albina Shagimuratova** (Gilda in *Rigoletto*), **Norman Reinhardt** (Benedict in *Beatrice and Benedict*), and **Marie Lenormand** (Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). "We take great pride in the artists we have fostered in our Studio program," noted Freud. "They are esteemed colleagues whose contributions to the field of opera are significant and international in scope, but they never cease to be members of the HGO family, so it is always with enormous pleasure that we invite them to return to Houston, where our audience holds a special affection for them."

HGO's 54<sup>th</sup> season begins with the verismo pairing of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, in repertory with Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict* – a setting of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. "I can't imagine a more perfect opening to our mainstage season," said Freud, adding that the fall operas will be led by two noted conductors making their HGO debuts. **Oleg Caetani**, principal conductor with the Melbourne Symphony, will lead the performances of *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci*, while **Michael Hofstetter** of Germany will conduct *Beatrice and Benedict*.

HGO Music Director **Patrick Summers** returns to the podium for the remaining four operas of HGO's season. *Chorus!*, which opens in January in repertory with Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is a brand new concept for Houston Grand Opera and will be directed by **David Pountney**. The work will be a spectacular, fully staged series of choruses from a wide variety of repertoire performed by HGO's acclaimed eighty member chorus and the entire HGO Orchestra. "*Chorus!* is fundamentally a collage, a bit like having separate pieces from twenty-two different jigsaw puzzles and piecing them together so that they create a new picture," said Pountney. Beginning with the Epigraph from Prokofiev's *War and Peace* and ending with Bernstein's *Candide*, *Chorus!* will feature selections from operas such as *Nabucco*, *Il Trovatore*, *Macbeth*, *Tannhäuser*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Carmen* and *Khovanschina*, as well as musical theater shows such as the *Sound of Music*, *Carousel* and *Candide*, flowing seamlessly together. "*Chorus!* is a celebration of the world-class chorus and orchestra of which HGO is so proud. We are putting them both in the spotlight to highlight their extraordinary artistry," stated Freud.

In January, the company continues its multi-year series of works of the British composer Benjamin Britten with the premiere of a new production (co-produced with Canadian Opera Company) of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The creative team includes acclaimed Australian stage director **Neil Armfield**, costume and set designer **Dale Ferguson** (Australia) and lighting designer **Damien Cooper** (Australia). The opera has not been performed at HGO since 1992. **Patrick Summers** will conduct. "We began our Benjamin Britten exploration with *Billy Budd*, one of the most inwardly profound of Britten's operas. Each question that arises from the plot is answered only by another question," stated Summers. "Next season we explore Britten's only Shakespeare adaptation, with its four distinct sound worlds representing each of the four sets of characters. A

*Midsummer Night's Dream* is a friendly, fun and uplifting evening.” HGO will present a series of Britten operas through the 2012-2013 season.

The season concludes with a classic production of Verdi's *Rigoletto* in repertory with the world premiere of André Previn's *Brief Encounter*. *Rigoletto* features central role debuts by three young artists. **Scott Hendricks**, who will sing his first *Rigoletto*, is an alumnus of the HGO Studio and has quickly established himself as an important artist in Verdi operas worldwide. Winner of the 2005 Richard Tucker Award, **Eric Cutler** returns to HGO for his role debut as Duke of Mantua. Russian soprano **Albina Shagimuratova**, who won the gold medal in women's voice at the prestigious Tchaikovsky International Competition in Moscow last summer and sang the Queen of the Night for HGO's current season, returns in her first *Gilda*. “These are three extraordinarily talented young artists with successful careers who chose to debut their roles here, and HGO is proud to welcome them back,” said Freud. “We are committed to giving exceptional opportunities to exceptional young artists.” *Rigoletto*, with sets by **Michael Yeargan**, will be directed by **Lindy Hume** of Australia and conducted by **Patrick Summers**.

*Brief Encounter* is André Previn's second opera following the success of his 1998 setting of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. It is based on Noël Coward's one-act play *Still Life* which Coward later adapted into the screenplay for David Lean's classic film *Brief Encounter*. “André Previn has always been a true Renaissance man and has excelled in all disciplines of music,” noted Patrick Summers. “He has spanned both classical and pop culture in the twentieth century in a unique way, and is especially connected to the golden era of Hollywood. The depth of his experience will definitely shine through gloriously in *Brief Encounter*.” The roles of the lovers, Laura Jesson and Alec Harvey, will be sung by soprano **Elizabeth Futral** and baritone **Nathan Gunn**. **John Caird**, the critically acclaimed co-director of Broadway's *Les Miserables* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, and one of the most distinguished British theater directors, is the librettist and will also direct. “Previn's subject matter, based on an iconic movie, will be appealing to a wide range of audiences. The work will come alive on the stage,” said Freud. Patrick Summers will conduct.

The complete calendar follows.



## 2007-2008 HOUSTON GRAND OPERA CALENDAR

Mascagni/Leoncavallo: *Cavalleria rusticana/Pagliacci* – Oct. 17\*, 19m\*\*, 24, 26m, 29,  
Nov. 1, 2008

Berlioz: *Beatrice and Benedict* – Oct. 30, Nov. 2m, 8, 12, 14, 2008

Britten: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – Jan. 23, 25m, 31, Feb. 4, 6, 2009 – *New production*

Various Composers: *Chorus!* – Jan. 30, Feb. 1m, 7, 11, 13, 2009 – *Newly conceived work*

Verdi: *Rigoletto* – April 17, 19m, 24, 26m, May 2, 2009

Previn: *Brief Encounter* – May 1, 3m, 5, 7, 9, 2009 – *World premiere*

\*Season Opening Night 7 p.m.; other evenings 7:30 p.m.; Sunday matinees (m) 2 p.m.

\*\*Special Nexus performance

Artist headshots and pre-production photos can be found on the press gallery page at:

<http://www.houstongrandopera.org/pressphotos/PressPhotos.aspx>

## CAST AND PRODUCTION INFORMATION

### *Cavalleria rusticana*

Music: Pietro Mascagni

Libretto: Menasci and Targioni-Tozzetti

Turiddù	Brandon Jovanovich
Santuzza	Dolora Zajick
Alfio	Charles Taylor
Mamma Lucia	Judith Christin

### *Pagliacci*

Music: Ruggiero Leoncavallo

Libretto: Ruggiero Leoncavallo

Canio	Vladimir Galouzine
Nedda	Ana María Martínez
Tonio	Charles Taylor
Silvio	Scott Hendricks
Houston Grand Opera Orchestra	Oleg Caetani, Conductor
Chorus Master	Richard Bado
Original Production	Elijah Moshinsky
Director	Leslie Halla Grayson
Set and Costume Designer	Michael Yeargan
Lighting Designer	Duane Schuler

Houston Grand Opera opens its 2008–09 season with *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci*, a pair of short verismo operas filled with betrayal, jealousy and revenge—the perfect partners for an evening of irresistible theater. A powerhouse cast takes charge: **Brandon Jovanovich** makes his HGO debut as *Cavalleria's* caddish Turiddù, with **Dolora Zajick** in one of her signature roles Santuzza, the woman he spurns. In *Pagliacci*, **Vladimir Galouzine** returns as the titular clown—the wronged husband whose jealousy escalates to insanity—with HGO Studio alumni **Ana María Martínez** and **Scott Hendricks** as his unfaithful wife and her paramour. In his house debut, **Charles Taylor** sings both the aggrieved husband in *Cavalleria* and the Iago-like catalyst of *Pagliacci*. **Oleg Caetani** conducts in his HGO debut; **Leslie Halla Grayson** directs.

*SIX PERFORMANCES:* Oct. 17, 2008 – 7 p.m. (Season Opening Night); **Oct. 19\*\***, **26** – 2 p.m.; Oct. 24, 29, Nov. 1 – 7:30 p.m.

*Brown Theater*

*Sung in Italian with English supertitles*

**\*\*The October 19<sup>th</sup> performance will be a Special Nexus Initiative performance; it is not part of the subscription series. Tickets for this performance will go on sale in the early fall.**

*These productions of Cavalleria rusticana and Pagliacci are owned by the Lyric Opera of Chicago and were made possible by the Julius Frankel Foundation*

Guarantor—**Albert and Margaret Alkek Foundation**

Grand Underwriters—**ConocoPhillips; Mr. and Mrs. Hal G. Kuntz**

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## CAST AND PRODUCTION INFORMATION

### *Beatrice and Benedict*

Music: Hector Berlioz

Libretto: Adapted from Shakespeare by the composer

Beatrice	Joyce DiDonato
Benedict	Norman Reinhardt
Hero	Ailish Tynan
Ursule	Leann Sandel-Pantaleo
Don Pedro	Ryan McKinny
Claudio	Liam Bonner
Somarone	Donald Maxwell

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus	Michael Hofstetter, Conductor
Chorus Master	Richard Bado
Original Production	Elijah Moshinsky
Director	Robin Tebbutt
Set Designer	Michael Yeargan
Costume Designer	Dona Granata
Lighting Designer	Howard Harrison

In Berlioz's light-hearted opera—based on Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*—two stubborn people use verbal jousting to mask their true feelings for each other. HGO Studio alums **Joyce DiDonato** and **Norman Reinhardt** are the recalcitrant lovers in HGO's first-ever staging of this comical and poignant work, while **Ailish Tynan** and **Liam Bonner** make perfect foils as the besotted Hero and Claudio. **Michael Hofstetter** conducts the Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus in his HGO debut; **Robin Tebbutt** also makes his company debut directing the sumptuous **Elijah Moshinsky** production with stunning period costumes by **Dona Granata** and richly detailed sets by **Michael Yeargan**.

*FIVE PERFORMANCES:* Oct. 30, Nov. 8, 12, 14 – 7:30 p.m.; Nov. 2 – 2 p.m.

*Brown Theater*

*Sung in English with English supertitles*

*This production of Beatrice and Benedict is owned by Opera Australia.*

Premiere Guarantor—**The General and Mrs. Maurice Hirsch Opera Fund**

## CAST AND PRODUCTION INFORMATION

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*- A new production

Music: Benjamin Britten

Libretto: Benjamin Britten

Oberon	Iestyn Davies
Tytania	Laura Claycomb
Puck	TBD
Lysander	Norman Reinhardt
Demetrius	Liam Bonner
Hermia	Marie Lenormand
Helena	Katie van Kooten
Bottom	Matthew Rose
Flute	Peter Wedd
Theseus	Ryan McKinny
Quince	Richard Bernstein
Hippolyta	Leann Sandel-Pantaleo

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra  
and Children's Chorus  
Children's Chorus Director  
Director  
Set and Costume Designer  
Lighting Designer  
Movement Director

Patrick Summers, Conductor  
Karen Reeves  
Neil Armfield  
Dale Ferguson  
Damien Cooper  
Denni Sayers

The king and queen of the fairies are feuding, two mortal couples break up and make up thanks (or no thanks!) to the juice of a magic flower, and the Duke of Athens is getting ready to wed the Queen of the Amazons—there's a whole lot going on in the forest just outside Athens. Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, based on Shakespeare's play, is performed by a superb ensemble cast including Houston favorite **Laura Claycomb** as Tytania and Welsh countertenor **Iestyn Davies** as Oberon in his company debut. This new production conducted by Patrick Summers and directed by **Neil Armfield** features whimsical set and costume designs by **Dale Ferguson** in his HGO debut. The sparkling Houston Grand Opera Children's Chorus, prepared by **Karen Reeves**, adds to the magic.

*FIVE PERFORMANCES:* Jan. 23, 31, Feb. 4, 6 – 7:30 p.m.; Jan. 25– 2 p.m.

*Brown Theater*

*Sung in English with English supertitles*

*A co-production of the Houston Grand Opera and Canadian Opera Company*

Guarantor—**The Methodist Hospital Center for Performing Arts Medicine**

**Supported in part through the Margaret Alkek Williams General Director Fund**

**The Britten Series is support in part through a contribution from The Britten Estate**

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## CAST AND PRODUCTION INFORMATION

*Chorus!* –A newly conceived work

Music: Various Composers

Bass-baritone soloist	Ryan McKinny
Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus	Patrick Summers, Conductor
Chorus Master	Richard Bado
Director	David Pountney
Set and Costume Designer	Johan Engels
Lighting Designer	Damien Cooper
Movement Director	Denni Sayers

The star of this show is the **Houston Grand Opera Chorus** in a fully costumed and staged paean to the dramatic art of ensemble singing. With the **Houston Grand Opera Orchestra** and members of our world-renowned HGO Studio and studio alum **Ryan McKinny**—all under the baton of Music Director **Patrick Summers**—*Chorus!* is an unforgettable evening of music and spectacle. After all, when have you seen choruses from Wagner’s *The Flying Dutchman* and Verdi’s *Nabucco* performed alongside selections from Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Pirates of Penzance* and Handel’s *Messiah*? This eclectic blend moves quickly and seamlessly under the guiding hands of celebrated director **David Pountney** and Houston Grand Opera Chorus Master **Richard Bado**. **Johan Engels** designs the sets and costumes.

*FIVE PERFORMANCES:* Jan. 30, Feb. 7, 11, 13 – 7:30 p.m.; Feb. 1 – 2 p.m.

*Brown Theater*

*Sung in various languages with English supertitles*

## CAST AND PRODUCTION INFORMATION

### ***Rigoletto***

Music: Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto: Francesco Maria Piave

Rigoletto	Scott Hendricks
Gilda	Albina Shagimuratova
Duke of Mantua	Eric Cutler
Sparafucile	Andrea Silvestrelli
Count Monterone	Bradley Garvin
Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus	Patrick Summers, Conductor
Chorus Master	Richard Bado
Director	Lindy Hume
Set Designer	Michael Yeargan
Costume Designer	Peter J. Hall
Lighting Designer	Paul Pyant

A bitter court jester pits himself against his master in a hopeless effort to protect his daughter's virtue. Three shining young artists—HGO Studio alumni **Scott Hendricks** and **Albina Shagimuratova**, along with **Eric Cutler**—make their role debuts as the hunchback Rigoletto, his adored daughter Gilda and the lecherous, remorseless Duke of Mantua. HGO Music Director **Patrick Summers** conducts Verdi's distinguished tragedy; **Lindy Hume** directs.

*FIVE PERFORMANCES:* April 17 , 24, May 2 - 7:30 p.m.; April 19 and 26 – 2:00 p.m.

*Brown Theater*

*Sung in Italian with English supertitles*

*Rigoletto is a co-production with The Dallas Opera.*

## CAST AND PRODUCTION INFORMATION

### ***Brief Encounter***- World premiere

An Opera in Two Acts

Music: André Previn

Libretto: John Caird

Based on the one-act play *Still Life* and the screenplay for the film *Brief Encounter* by Noël Coward. Commissioned by Houston Grand Opera

Laura Jesson

Alec Harvey

Fred Jesson

Dolly Messiter

Myrtle Bagot

Albert Godby

Elizabeth Futral

Nathan Gunn

Kim Josephson

Rebekah Camm

Meredith Arwady

Robert Orth

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra

Director

Set and Costume Designer

Lighting Designer

Patrick Summers, Conductor

John Caird

Bunny Christie

Paul Pyant

Houston Grand Opera presents the world premiere of **André Previn**'s *Brief Encounter*, based on David Lean's classic film with screenplay by Noël Coward. A compassionate look at emotional infidelity, *Brief Encounter* stars **Elizabeth Futral** and **Nathan Gunn** as Laura and Alec, the couple torn between love and honor, and **Kim Josephson** as Laura's bewildered husband. **John Caird** is both librettist and director; **Patrick Summers** conducts.

*FIVE PERFORMANCES:* May 1, 5, 7, 9— 7:30 p.m.; May 3<sup>rd</sup> — 2 p.m

*Brown Theater*

*Sung in English with English supertitles*

Guarantor—**Albert and Margaret Alkek Foundation**

Grand Underwriter—**Anadarko Petroleum Corporation**

*Brief Encounter* is support in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts

The production of *Brief Encounter* received funding from OPERA America's *Opera Fund*

**20<sup>th</sup> Annual Concert of Arias**

The Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers

*ONE PERFORMANCE ONLY:* February 5, 2009 - 7 p.m.

*Cullen Theater*

Concert of Arias serves as the final round of The Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers. Auditions are conducted throughout the country with hundreds of singers annually auditioning for the chance to win career development grants, cash prizes and possible entry into the world-renowned HGO Studio – a training ground for young artists with the potential for major careers in the opera/music theater profession. Finalists from these auditions will perform in the *Concert of Arias* as the final phase in this competition.

***Rienzi Recitals***

September 26, 27 (Friday & Saturday) 7:30pm

December 5, 6 (Friday & Saturday) 7:30pm

February 20, 21 (Friday & Saturday) 7:30pm

May 19, 20 (Tuesday & Wednesday) 7:30pm

Intimate evenings of art and song: the artists of the Houston Grand Opera Studio in recital at Rienzi, the European Decorative Arts wing of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

For information or to purchase tickets, please call Rienzi at 713-639-7800.

All performances take place at Rienzi, 1406 Kirby Drive, Houston TX



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**Special thanks:** The 2008-09 season is funded in part by the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance, that National Endowment for the Arts and the Texas Commission on the Arts. Chevron is Grand Underwriter of HGO's Community Connections Initiative. Target is presenting sponsor of *Opera to Go!*. Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is Grand Underwriter HGO's education and outreach programs.



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## **Ticket Information:**

**Subscriptions for the 2008-09 season go on sale March 1, 2008.** Nexus subscriptions are available starting at \$67.50, thanks to generous support from **Anadarko Petroleum Corporation** who partners with HGO in the Nexus Initiative. For further information, please visit HGO's website at [www.HoustonGrandOpera.org](http://www.HoustonGrandOpera.org) or call Customer Care at 713-228-6737.

Single tickets will go on sale October 1, 2008.

All performances will take place at the Wortham Theater Center, 501 Texas Avenue, Houston, Texas 77002. The Wortham Theater Center features wheelchair access to both theaters, with a choice of seating locations and ticket prices. An infrared listening system, underwritten by Shell Lubricants, is available and free of charge at all performances. Disabled access and TDD: 713-228-OPERA (6737) or 1-800-62-OPERA (800-626-7372); Descriptive Services: 713-546-0230.

The Wells Fargo Pre-Curtain Lecture Series takes place forty-five minutes before each performance. Colin Ure, HGO's dramaturg, and Ann Thompson present a twenty-minute informal lecture in the orchestra level of the Brown Theater. These lectures, free and open to all ticket holders, are intended to enhance the audience's enjoyment by preparing them for the production they are about to attend.

Since its inception in 1955, Houston Grand Opera has become an internationally renowned opera company. With a reputation for commissioning and producing new works (36 world premieres and seven American premieres since 1973) as well as reaching out to new audiences. HGO has toured extensively, including trips to Europe and Asia, and it is the only opera company to have won a Tony, two Grammy, and two Emmy awards. Houston Grand Opera's productions are broadcast on the WFMT Radio Network, as well as through the European Broadcasting Union, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

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