

**HoustonGrandOpera**



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**HOUSTON GRAND OPERA ANNOUNCES PLANS FOR *RING* CYCLE**  
Company's First *Ring* to be Co-Produced with Opera Australia

August 24, 2010 – HOUSTON TX **Houston Grand Opera (HGO)** today confirmed plans to co-produce a complete ***Ring* cycle** with **Opera Australia**, which will bring Wagner's complete *Der Ring des Nibelungen* to Houston for the first time in the company's history. Pending the successful conclusion of a fundraising campaign, the new production will be led by Australian director **Neil Armfield** – well known in Houston as well as in the US due to his work on HGO's ongoing series of productions of the operas of Benjamin Britten and to the success of *Exit the King* on Broadway – and conducted by the company's music director, Patrick Summers.

**Anthony Freud**, OBE, General Director and CEO of Houston Grand Opera, noted that Opera Australia and HGO have collaborated on several important initiatives in recent seasons, including the acclaimed production of *Peter Grimes* which HGO presents as part of its 2010/11 season: "It is a thrill to work with Opera Australia on a groundbreaking new production of these important operas, and we look forward to bringing Houston Grand Opera's first-ever *Ring* to the stage," he said.

HGO will present the operas over the course of four seasons beginning in 2014, pending the successful conclusion of its fundraising campaign. "Bringing the *Ring* to Houston for the first time is an important step for the company artistically and for our audience as well. It will require significant resources," added Freud. "We are visiting with all of our stakeholders to ensure that we can take this step securely and that our mission to produce opera of the highest quality is fulfilled."

"It is particularly gratifying to contemplate a *Ring* that brings together such a distinguished director and our own music director, **Patrick Summers**," Freud continued, adding that Summers's leadership and development of the Houston Grand Opera Orchestra since joining the company in 1999 was one of the major factors in the decision to mount a *Ring* in Houston. Just last season, Summers conducted *Lohengrin*, the company's acclaimed first entrée into Wagnerian repertoire in a decade; reviewing the performance in *Opera News*, critic Gregory Barnett stated, "Under Summers's ever-alert and sensitive direction, the eighty-piece Orchestra – at times commenting with crispness and agility, at

times shaking the walls with sweeping, transcendent climaxes – took its rightful place beside the singers as a narrative instrument...(and) the Houston audience could bask in Wagner's orchestral detail without losing a note of the singing.”

Summers and Armfield have collaborated on all of the company's Britten operas, most recently on an acclaimed production of *The Turn of the Screw* (2010), and will join forces for *Peter Grimes* this season. The *Ring* cycle marks Armfield's first encounter as director with the operas of Richard Wagner.

Casting for the *Ring* operas has not yet been announced. They will be performed at Houston Grand Opera over the course of four seasons, as follows: 2014 - *Das Rheingold*; 2015 - *Die Walküre*; 2016 - *Siegfried*; and 2017 - *Götterdämmerung*.

### **About the *Ring***

German composer Richard Wagner composed the *Ring* as a series of four operas based loosely on stories from Norse mythology. Although Wagner is renowned for his many other operatic works including *Lohengrin*, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Der Fliegende Holländer*, the *Ring* Operas are by far his best-known works and took nearly thirty years to develop. In all the *Ring* Operas span 15 hours of live opera.

### **Neil Armfield**

Neil Armfield made his HGO debut in 2008 directing Britten's *Billy Budd* and his most recent credit here is *The Turn of the Screw*, a production that originated at Opera Australia and has also been seen at Brisbane Opera. His critically-acclaimed production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had its premiere here in 2009 starring Laura Claycomb; it has since been seen at Canadian Opera Company, and will be presented by Lyric Opera of Chicago this season. Among his numerous Britten opera credits include *Billy Budd* at Opera Australia, English National Opera, Canadian Opera Company and Welsh National Opera—his production of that opera won a Barclay's Award and six Dora Mavor Awards. Further opera credits include a new production of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* for West Australian Opera and the world premiere opera *Bliss* by Brett Dean, at Opera Australia in Melbourne and Sydney, and at the Edinburgh Festival. Mr. Armfield is an accomplished theater director, having recently directed Ionesco's *Exit the King* on Broadway to critical acclaim. He has directed for all of Australia's state theatre companies and for international opera companies such as Welsh National Opera, Zurich Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago and Royal Opera, Covent Garden. Mr. Armfield holds the title Officer of the Order of Australia, which he was given for his service to the arts. Further awards and honors include six Helpmann Awards at Dublin International Festival of the Arts for *Cloudstreet* and multiple Green Room Awards and Sydney Critics' Circle Awards in the category of best director. Mr. Armfield is Artistic Director of Company B at the Belvoir Theatre in Surry Hills, Australia, where his most recent new production is the world premiere of Tommy Murphy's play *Gwen in Purgatory*, a collaboration with La Boite Theatre Company. His production of Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* was presented by Boston Lyric Opera last spring, and will be seen at both Welsh National Opera and Canadian Opera Company this season.

### **Patrick Summers**

Patrick Summers made an acclaimed company debut in 1999 conducting Verdi's *La traviata* and has since conducted more than thirty operas here, including Wagner's *Lohengrin* last fall and Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* and Puccini's *Tosca* last winter. His HGO world premieres include

*Brief Encounter* by André Previn; *Three Decembers (Last Acts)* and *The End of the Affair* by Jake Heggie; *The Refuge* by Christopher Theofanidis; and *Resurrection* by Todd Machover. Maestro Summers also led the world premiere of Carlisle Floyd's *Cold Sassy Tree*, which is available on CD from Albany Records. He recently conducted the world premieres of Moravec's *The Letter* at the Santa Fe Opera and Heggie's *Moby Dick* at the Dallas Opera, to great acclaim. His diverse credits at the Metropolitan Opera include *Salome* and *Madama Butterfly*. Other highlights include *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Ariodante* and *Three Decembers (Last Acts)* at San Francisco Opera, where he has been appointed principal guest conductor; *La Cenerentola* at the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona; and Verdi's *Nabucco* and Puccini's *Turandot* with Opera Australia. Maestro Summers led the Orchestra of Saint Luke's on Renée Fleming's Grammy Award-winning solo recording *Bel Canto*, available from Decca.

Since its inception in 1955, Houston Grand Opera has swiftly moved from a small regional organization into an internationally renowned opera company. The company has a reputation for commissioning and producing new works (40 world premieres and six American premieres since 1973) as well as a reputation for 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 nationally over the WFMT network, and internationally over the European Broadcasting Union, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.