

HoustonGrandOpera



For Immediate Release: January 3, 2011  
Press Contacts Chris Novosad, 713-546-0278 [cnovosad@houstongrandopera.org](mailto:cnovosad@houstongrandopera.org)

## HGO Celebrates Houston's Eastern Communities with *Song of Houston: East+West*

HOUSTON—Houston Grand Opera announces the launch of *Song of Houston: East + West*, a series of new operas that celebrate Houston as a meeting place for Eastern and Western cultures.

"*Song of Houston: East + West* will explore the stories of first- and second-generation immigrants to Houston from all over the East, starting with the Chinese community," said **Anthony Freud**, general director and CEO of Houston Grand Opera. The project will continue through 2014 and is expected to commission a series of nine chamber operas. "As its name implies, *Song of Houston* is deeply rooted in the cultures of all those for whom Houston is home, and will generate fresh, relevant, exciting new operas by important composers and librettists. We are passionate about collaborating meaningfully with communities throughout our city," said Freud.

The first *Song of Houston* commission, *The Refuge* (2007, Christopher Theofanidis and Leah Lax) explored the experiences of immigrants to Houston from Africa, Mexico, El Salvador, Vietnam, India, Pakistan, and the former Soviet Union. *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna / To Cross the Face of the Moon* (2010, José "Pepe" Martínez and Leonard Foglia) told a story of three generations of a Mexican-American family.

The first opera in the *East + West* series, *Courtside*, was composed by **Jack Perla** with a libretto by **Eugenie Chan**. Set in the Chinese community in Houston, it will have its premiere at a free performance at the Chinese Community Center on February 5, 2011 at 11:30 a.m., during the Lunar New Year celebrations. Additional community performances will follow. *Courtside* tells the story of three generations of Chinese Americans who must find ways to reconcile differences in order to live with pride in contemporary America, while maintaining tradition.

Making his HGO debut with *Courtside*, composer Jack Perla is known for creating musical works for the stage using a palette that includes classical instrumentation and voice mixed with multiple jazz idioms. Perla was the 1997 Jazz Composer Award winner from the Thelonious Monk Institute and the American Composers Forum Award winner in 2008. He is currently a member of

the music faculty of Santa Clara University where he teaches composition, jazz piano, and courses in orchestration and jazz history.

San Francisco playwright Eugenie Chan, librettist for *Courtside*, has received grants from the New Works Fund and Theater Bay Area, as well as fellowships from the Berilla Kerr Foundation and the George Lucas Educational Foundation. Her other plays include *Daphne Does Dim Sum*, *Rancho Grande*, *Tour Sino* and *Consent*. This opera marks Chan's debut with HGO.

"At its heart, *Song of Houston* is an extraordinary series of projects that celebrate the people who define the unique character of our city," commented **Sandra Bernhard**, Director of HGOco, which produces and manages the *Song of Houston* project. "With its large presence and vibrant culture, the Chinese community was a logical choice." **HGOco** exists to expand and reinvent the purposes of opera, establishing HGO as a relevant cultural resource for our city and art form.

*Courtside* is written for a cast of four (tenor **Peter Tran**, soprano **Seong Shin Ra**, baritone **Wesley Landry**, and bass-baritone **Kelvin Chan**) with a chamber ensemble of violin, cello, bass, vibraphone and pipa. *Courtside* will be directed by **Leslie Swackhamer**. Sets are designed by **Elizabeth Freese** and costumes by **Macy Perrone**. **Joseph Li** is the music director.

More information about other *Song of Houston* projects, visit the HGOco website at [www.hgoco.org](http://www.hgoco.org).

###

Since its inception in 1955, Houston Grand Opera has grown from a small regional organization into an internationally renowned opera company. The company has a reputation for commissioning and producing new works (41 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.

**Synopsis:**

*Courtside* follows three generations of Chinese Americans who must balance Chinese traditions at home with American expectations on the basketball court. Both of which need to be reconciled when Jason Ching, a hot-shot, high school basketball player fights when taunted on the court.

**Performance Summary:**

The premiere performance of *Courtside* will be at 11:30 a.m. on Saturday, February 5, 2011 at

Houston Chinese Community Center  
9800 Town Park  
Houston, TX 77036  
713-271-6100 or [www.ccchouston.org](http://www.ccchouston.org)

**Ticket Information:**

- Admission to the Chinese Community Center Lunar New Year Celebration is free.
- For more information please contact the HGOco offices at 713-546-0211 or online at [www.hgoco.org](http://www.hgoco.org).

## **Artist Information:**

### **Jack Perla** (composer)

Jack Perla makes his HGO debut with this *Song of Houston* commission. Jack has received awards and fellowships from the American Composers Forum, James Irvine Foundation, Argosy Foundation, American Music Center, Meet the Composer, Civic Orchestra of Chicago, and the MacDowell Colony. His work has been performed and presented by the Louisiana and Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestras, Oakland Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Absolute Ensemble (New York City), New Music Chicago, and MATA (NY). In 1997 Jack received the Thelonious Monk Institute Jazz Composers Award. Subsequently he performed at the Texaco New York Jazz Festival, Knitting Factory (NY), Tampere Jazz Festival (Finland), the Big Sur, Monterey and Pacifica Jazz Festivals, the Millennium Festival (England), and throughout Japan. Jack has also appeared with Zakir Hussain and Aashish Khan, with whom he is featured on George Brook's 1999 recording *Night Spinner*. He earned his DMA from the Yale School of Music and his BM from the Manhattan School of Music, and joined the Music faculty of Santa Clara University in 2007, where he teaches Composition, Jazz Piano and Music Technology.

### **Eugenie Chan** (librettist)

Eugenie Chan makes her HGO debut with *Courtside*. Her work has been produced or developed at the Public, Playwrights Horizons, Cutting Ball, San Francisco Mime Troupe, the Magic, Northwest Asian American Theatre, among other venues. This year, Eugenie will also debut *Diadem* at Cutting Ball Theater, in addition to workshopping new plays *Madame Ho* and *Tontlawald*, and participate as a Resident Artist at Sundance Playwrights Retreat, Ucross. She is a Resident Playwright at New Dramatists, Cutting Ball Theater, and the Playwrights Foundation.

### **Shenshen Zhang** (pipa)

A native of China, Ms Zhang earned her Bachelor's Degree from the prestigious Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, and received a Master's Degree from Xiamen University in 2005. In Xiamen, Ms. Zhang was Pipa soloist at the Xiamen Opera House, playing over a thousand performances in China, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines. An accomplished soloist, Ms Zhang is also a celebrated collaborator with Western and Eastern artists, including Symphony Silicon Valley (San Jose), Bridge Chamber Virtuosi (San Francisco), Melody of China, jazz trombonist Wayne Wallace and choreographer Alonzo King. In June 2010, Ms Zhang was one of the American artists representing San Francisco at the Shanghai World Expo.

### **Peter Tran** (Jason Ching)

Peter Tran is a junior year student at Moores School of Music at the University of Houston. Pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Music degree, he is currently in the studio of Hector Vasquez. An emergent tenor at Moores Opera Center; he has recently performed as Prosper in *La Vie Parisienne*. Upcoming roles this season include Reginald Cluck and Cedric Prestwick in *Impresario*, *Impresario!*, Mario's Father in *Il Postino*, and the 1st Armored man and 2nd Priest in *The Magic Flute*.

### **Kelvin Chan** (Goong-Goong Ching)

Kelvin Chan, hailing from Chino Hills, CA, is an avid performer of the operatic, concert, and recital repertoire. Recent operatic engagements include Cincinnati Opera, where he performed the role of Yamadori in *Madam Butterfly* and Opera Theater of Pittsburgh where he created the role of Shi-Yin in *RedDust*, an opera electronica by Mathew Rosenblum. Kelvin has also performed the roles of Harlekin in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Schaunaud in *La Bohème*, and Valmont in Conrad Susa's *The Dangerous Liaisons*. Kelvin has appeared with the Minnesota Opera, Ex Machina Antique Music Theater, and Nautilus Music-Theater. On the concert stage, Kelvin has performed as a soloist in Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem*, Faure's *Requiem*, Haydn's *Harmoniemesse* and Mozart's *Requiem*. For five years, he performed with the all-male chamber vocal ensemble, Cantus, and served as that ensemble's Artistic Co-Director. With Cantus, he performed concerts in 46 of the contiguous 48 states and recorded five albums. Kelvin is an avid recitalist, with a particular interest in modern and contemporary American art song. A graduate of Carleton College, with a B.A. in geology, Kelvin received his M.M. in voice performance at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and is continuing his studies there in the Doctor of Musical Arts program.

### **Seong Shin Ra** (Margaret Ching)

Soprano Seong Shin Ra, a native of Seoul, Korea, holds a Master of Music Degree from the Korean National University of Art and, in 2009, earned a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her opera credits include Cio-Cio San in *Madama Butterfly*, Violetta in *La traviata*, Countess Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Lucia in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and Pamina in *The Magic Flute*. Dr. Ra was selected to perform for the UW-Madison Chancellor's Concert in 2007 and was invited as a soloist at the Governor's Annual Memorial Day Ceremony at the Wisconsin State Capitol in 2009. Ms. Ra moved to Houston recently where she is thrilled to share her musical talent with the community.

**Wesley Landry** (Trevor Johnson)

Wesley Landry, baritone, has been a Studio Artist for Opera New Jersey's acclaimed Emerging Artist program for the past three summers, understudying for Cascada in *The Merry Widow*, Pooh-Bah in *The Mikado*, and Masetto in *Don Giovanni*. He also appeared on the mainstage this past summer as the Notary in *Don Pasquale*. He received his Masters degree from the University of Houston. While there, he took on the roles of Starveling in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus*, and Mr. Beebe in *A Room with a View*. An active musician in the Houston area, Wes made his solo debut at Houston Grand Opera as the Customs Guard in *La bohème* (2006). He has sung with the Houston Grand Opera Chorus since 2005. Concert appearances include performances of Mozart's *Requiem* and *Solemn Vespers* with Chorale Acadienne in Lafayette, Louisiana. Wes is a soloist with St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Houston's historic Heights neighborhood.

*Song of Houston: East + West* is supported in part by

Guarantor

**The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**

Underwriters

**ANDREWS**  
ATTORNEYS **KURTH** LLP  
STRAIGHT TALK IS GOOD BUSINESS.®

**The Humphreys Foundation**



**Marathon  
Oil Corporation**

is Underwriter of *Song of Houston*  
education and community engagement programs

**Continental  
Airlines**



*Official Airline of Houston Grand Opera*

**MOMENTUM  
JAGUAR**



*Official Vehicle of Houston Grand Opera*



**The Methodist  
Hospital**

Center for  
Performing Arts Medicine

*Official Healthcare Provider to Houston Grand Opera*