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## **Joyce DiDonato Named as the 2011–12 Lynn Wyatt Great Artist at Houston Grand Opera**

Houston, TX. January 21, 2011 — **Lynn Wyatt**, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors of **Houston Grand Opera** (HGO) and a Life Trustee of the organization, together with **Anthony Freud**, HGO General Director and CEO, today announced that mezzo-soprano **Joyce DiDonato** will be the Lynn Wyatt Great Artist at Houston Grand Opera for the 2011–12 season.

**The Lynn Wyatt Great Artist Fund** at Houston Grand Opera — an endowed fund dedicated to bringing the world’s best operatic artists to HGO - was established in 2010 with a gift of \$1,000,000 from **Oscar Wyatt** in honor of Lynn Wyatt's many years of philanthropy and service to the company. The first Lynn Wyatt Great Artist at Houston Grand Opera was **Ana María Martínez**, who opened the 2010-11 season to great acclaim as Cio-Cio San in a sold-out run of Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*.

DiDonato, currently starring as Sister Helen Prejean in HGO's production of *Dead Man Walking*, will headline next season in Donizetti's epic *Maria Stuarda*. (The company will announce its full 2011-12 season next week.)

“I am enormously pleased to announce that Joyce DiDonato is the Lynn Wyatt Great Artist for the 2011-12 season,” said Wyatt. “In selecting her, it is the qualities that set her apart – not just the beauty of her voice and her absolute dedication to her art, but also her willingness to stretch, to risk, to reach for new heights – that I find inspiring. It is wonderful that she grew up in our Houston Grand Opera Studio and always exciting when she returns to our stage to test her mettle in new roles. Joyce represents to me the future of the art form, and I am especially excited about her debut in *Maria Stuarda* next season.”

“Over many years, Lynn Wyatt's passion, generosity, leadership and commitment have been truly inspirational,” says Freud. “Lynn has made it her mission to help Houston Grand Opera to achieve its maximum artistic potential, and to ensure that HGO will continue to innovate for future generations. And of course, Joyce DiDonato represents not only the superlative artistic quality that we strive to present on our stage year in and year out, but as an alumna of the HGO Studio and a veteran of so many important productions here, she is also a cherished member of the HGO family.”

Joyce DiDonato was a member of the Houston Grand Opera Studio from 1996–98 and now appears to great acclaim at the world's most important opera houses, including The Royal Opera Covent Garden, the Metropolitan Opera, Paris Opera, Geneva Opera and Teatro alla Scala (Milan). A dedicated recording artist, she was recently named *Gramophone Magazine's* “Artist of the Year.” At Houston Grand Opera, she starred in Mark Adamo's *Little Women* (just released on DVD) as well as Rossini's *La Cenerentola* and Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict*.

DiDonato commented, “I am thrilled to return to Houston Grand Opera in the 2011–12 season and deeply honored to do so as the Lynn Wyatt Great Artist. Houston Grand Opera is where I have grown up, and I've always felt encouraged to take risks and stretch myself as an artist here; in fact it has been an enormous part of my development. The shared vision of excellence that Lynn Wyatt and Anthony Freud and Patrick Summers take so much care to shape and support is truly inspiring to me, and I am thrilled to have been chosen for this.”

An international leader in raising support and awareness for worthy causes, Wyatt was recently honored with a 2011 National Opera Trustee Recognition Award by OPERA America, the national service organization for opera. A devoted wife, mother, grandmother and an active philanthropist in Houston and beyond, Mrs. Wyatt has been the Vice Chairman of the Houston Grand Opera Board since 1984 and is a longtime member of HGO's marketing committee, where she has provided valuable guidance on ways to attract new audiences and expand the demographic of the company's reach. In 2005, she chaired the organization's 50th anniversary Golden Jubilee Gala, which raised a record-breaking \$2.5 million dollars for HGO. She is a member of the French Legion of Honor.

Mrs. Wyatt's support and sponsorship of productions at Houston Grand Opera includes Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* (2010), Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades* (2010) and the world premiere of André Previn's *Brief Encounter* (2009). She is also a strong proponent of Houston Grand Opera's community collaborations, including the recent production of the world's first Mariachi Opera, *To Cross the Face of the Moon / Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* (2010) and *The Refuge* (2007), an original work highlighting the stories of seven immigrant communities in Houston. Other productions that have benefitted from her support include Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* (2000), the 1991 Placido Domingo concert and the world premiere of Leonard Bernstein's *A Quiet Place* (1983).

"Lynn understands the quality and importance of excellence, what it takes to attain it, and why a company like Houston Grand Opera relies upon it," says HGO Music Director **Patrick Summers**. "We are indeed fortunate to benefit not only from her financial support but from her keen and sensitive intelligence."

"Lynn Wyatt has anchored HGO's board leadership for almost thirty years," says HGO Board of Directors Chairman **Glen Rosenbaum**. "In addition to inspiring our board members and serving as HGO's leading fundraiser, Lynn's unique vision has played a major role in establishing Houston Grand Opera's position of excellence among international opera companies."

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



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