

HoustonGrandOpera



**PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** August 24, 2010

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**HOUSTON GRAND OPERA PRESENTS  
WORLD'S FIRST MARIACHI OPERA  
*TO CROSS THE FACE OF THE MOON / CRUZAR LA CARA DE LA LUNA***

**New Work Unites Mariachi and Opera Traditions**

**World Premiere Performance November 13, 2010 – featuring  
Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán – “el mejor Mariachi del mundo”**

HOUSTON, TX—**Houston Grand Opera (HGO)** will present its forty-first world premiere, *To Cross the Face of the Moon / Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*, commissioned by HGO through its **Song of Houston** project. Music by **José “Pepe” Martínez**, music director of **Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán**, with libretto by acclaimed Broadway director and author **Leonard Foglia**, the opera will be performed in concert by a cast that includes mezzo-soprano **Cecilia Duarte**, baritone and HGO studio alumnus **Octavio Moreno**, and Martínez, together with Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, on Saturday, November 13, 2010, at the Wortham Theater Center in Houston, Texas. This will be Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán’s only Houston performance in 2010.

The new opera was the brainchild of HGO General Director and CEO **Anthony Freud**, who attended a performance by Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán and was struck by the resonances between mariachi and operatic traditions. “Opera arias and mariachi songs tell human stories of love and loss, family and country; through music they aim their narratives straight at the heart,” says Freud. “It seemed to me that the two traditions were a natural fit. I wanted to be certain that we respected the integrity of both traditions in the piece we created, so it was also natural to turn to Pepe Martínez to compose it, given how strongly he has influenced contemporary mariachi repertoire, and to Leonard Foglia, whose truly operatic style of storytelling and theatricality is his signature, to write the lyrics.” He added, “I am truly thrilled that we will have the honor of performing the world premiere with Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, who are supreme practitioners of the art of mariachi music.”

Composer and music director José “Pepe” Martínez has been writing for and performing and recording with Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán since 1975; the ensemble has been in existence since 1897, and most of the storied composers, arrangers and performers in the mariachi tradition have at one time or another been in the ensemble. The 13-piece ensemble includes violins, trumpets, guitarrón, guitar, vihuela and harp. Internationally acclaimed, the group tours annually in the United States and throughout the world, and has produced more than 50 recordings. “In my career, I have written many different kinds of songs which told many different stories,” said Martínez. “This is the first time I have written in an operatic context, but the story and the characters are very moving, and I think the mariachi tradition helps bring them to life in a way that is both relevant and very exciting.”

*To Cross the Face of the Moon* chronicles three generations of a family, divided by countries and cultures. “The emotional and spiritual connection to one’s country of origin, the challenges of being a stranger in a strange land, the very nature of home are at the heart of the immigrant experience, and of the opera,” said Foglia, who makes his home in Querétaro, in Central Mexico.

“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. Its first commission was *The Refuge*, which premiered in November 2007, told stories collected from Houston’s African, Central American, Indian, Mexican, Pakistani, Soviet-era Jewish and Vietnamese communities. “We wanted to focus our efforts on the Mexican community in Houston because of the multi-generational nature of their experience here. This project gave us the opportunity to explore a universal theme of home and belonging and to collaborate in a way that honors a unique musical tradition. We’re honored to be bringing something new and very special into being.”

A first-of-its-kind collaboration with **Talento Bilingüe de Houston** will follow the concert performance at Wortham Theater Center. The work will be fully staged and presented at Talento Bilingüe de Houston with HGO’s vocal cast and a Texan mariachi ensemble. There will be four performances of the fully staged version on December 3, 4 and 5, 2010. “This event marries the magic of culture and song in a premiere stage engagement celebrating Houston’s Latin community,” says **Juan Esquivel**, President and CEO of Talento Bilingüe de Houston. “We are proud to combine efforts with HGO to bring a world-class performance for a multi-diverse and multicultural audience right to the heart of Houston’s East End.”

Tickets for the November 13 world premiere of *To Cross the Face of the Moon / Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* go on sale on September 7, 2010, and range in price from \$35 to \$125. They can be purchased online at [www.houstongrandopera.org](http://www.houstongrandopera.org), or by calling Houston Grand Opera Customer Care at 713-228-6737.

**Houston Grand Opera presents**

*To Cross the Face of the Moon / Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*

*A Mariachi Opera*

Music by José “Pepe” Martínez – Libretto by Leonard Foglia

Starring Cecilia Duarte, Octavio Moreno, and David Guzman

Featuring José “Pepe” Martínez as Chucho

with Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán

Performed in Spanish and English with surtitles

Saturday, November 13, 2010

8:00 p.m., Brown Auditorium, Wortham Theater Center

500 Texas Street – Houston, TX 77002

Tickets and Information: [www.houstongrandopera.org](http://www.houstongrandopera.org) / 713-228-6737

**SYNOPSIS**

Where is home? Is it where we are born? Or where we live most of our lives? Is it with the family we leave behind or with the new ones we create?

*To Cross the Face of the Moon / Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* chronicles three generations of a family, divided by countries and cultures. As a Mexican/American man deals with the approaching death of his father, he is forced to face these questions about his own place in the world – straddling two cultures – as well as that of his immigrant father and his American daughter. As long buried secrets are revealed, he finds himself dramatically re-evaluating his own understanding of what makes a family.

Like the Monarch butterflies that migrate every year to the birthplace of his father, the members of the Velasquez family must travel both physically and spiritually between Michoacán and Texas and look deep into their hearts before they learn where they truly belong.

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Anthony Freud** was appointed as HGO's third General Director and first CEO in July 2005. Since joining Houston Grand Opera he has seen the completion of a five-year strategic plan; brought to the stage acclaimed new productions of Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, Rossini's *La Cenerentola* (Cinderella) and Verdi's *Aida*, as well as the world premieres of *The Refuge* (Christopher Theofanidis), *Three Decembers* (Jake Heggie), and *Brief Encounter* (André Previn); launched a multi-year cycle of works by Benjamin Britten; established HGOco, a radical initiative aiming to deepen HGO's relevance throughout Houston and to restore culture and the arts to positions of central importance in our communities; and created the Founder's Council for Artistic Excellence, a multi-year giving society plus the NEXUS Initiative, an audience development program that provides underwriting for free and affordably-priced performances for new audiences.

Before joining Houston Grand Opera, Freud served as General Director of the Welsh National Opera (WNO), and produced 120 performances annually throughout England and Wales. From 1992 to 1994, Mr. Freud was Executive Producer for Philips Classics, where he oversaw large-scale recording projects for such artists as Jessye Norman, Seiji Ozawa, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, and Bernard Haitink. Mr. Freud graduated, with honors, with a law degree from the University of London King's College, London.

Mr. Freud has served as Chairman of Opera Europa, Europe's largest professional opera association, and currently serves as Chairman of the Board of Opera America. Mr. Freud has served on the juries of many international singing competitions, and chaired the jury of the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition for a decade. In 2006 he was appointed a Trustee of the United Kingdom's National Endowment for Science, Technology, and the Arts. He is an honorary fellow of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and he was named Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by Queen Elizabeth II during her 2006 Birthday Awards.

**José "Pepe" Martínez** was born in Tecalitlán, Jalisco, Mexico, and joined his first mariachi band as a violinist at the age of 12. He began writing music when he was 19 years old, and formed his own mariachi ensemble in 1966, called Mariachi Nuevo Tecalitlán, which was one of the most dynamic mariachi bands in Mexico throughout the mid-1960s and early 1970s. In 1975, he joined Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán. His work with Mariachi Vargas established Martínez as a composer and arranger and brought into being a sonic style that has become synonymous with "el mejor Mariachi del Mundo". "Somos Novios" and "El Cascabel" are two of the first songs Martínez rearranged for his new group; original works such as "Violín Huapango," "Lluvia De Cuerdas" and "Mexicanísimo" and the popurri "Viva Vera Cruz," with its rapid violin ricochets – a Martínez signature – followed. Today, Martínez continues writing, learning, performing and breaking new ground in the creation of mariachi music as Music Director of the ensemble. *To Cross the Face of the Moon / Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* is his first opera.

**Leonard Foglia** directed Terrence McNally's 1996 Tony Award-winning play *Master Class* on Broadway - his other credits include *Wait Until Dark* by Frederick Knott. Off-Broadway, his credits include *One Touch of Venus* for Encores! at City Center; *If Memory Serves* by Jonathan Tolins; *By the Sea, By the Sea, By the Beautiful Sea* by Terrence McNally, Joe Pintauro, and Lanford Wilson at the Manhattan Theatre Club and the Bay Street Theater Festival and *Lonely Planet* by Steven Dietz at Circle Repertory Company. At Houston Grand Opera, he has had a close association with the works of

Jake Heggie, having directed the world premieres of *The End of the Affair* (2004) and *Last Acts* (2009). He will direct Heggie's *Dead Man Walking* at Houston Grand Opera later this season.

**Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán** was founded in 1898 by Gaspar Vargas in Tecalitlán, Jalisco. Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán is considered to be the most important and influential group in the history of mariachi music, playing an integral role in the evolution of the genre. In the 1930s, its leadership was taken over by Silvestre Vargas, son of Gaspar; he and Ruben Fuentes, the first trained musician ever to direct the ensemble led Mariachi Vargas into the modern era of films, recordings and broadcasts. Among the prominent musicians who have worked with Mariachi Vargas in the ensuing decades were Pedro Infante, Miguel Aceves Mejia, Lola Beltrán and Jose Alfredo Jimenez. Mariachi Vargas has toured the world and shared its music with people of all cultures on more than 800 recordings.

**HGOco's Song of Houston project** brings company and community together to collaborate on musical storytelling projects. It was recognized with a Leading Lights Diversity Award from the National Multi-Cultural Institute in 2010 – the first time in the Institute's twenty-seven year history that an opera company has received this prestigious national award. Song of Houston continues in 2011 with two new programs: East + West, a four-year exploration of the Houston community as a meeting place of Eastern and Western cultures, and a celebration of Houston's first-responder heroes in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of 9/11.

**Talento Bilingüe de Houston** was founded in 1977 as "Teatro Bilingüe de Houston" (Bilingual Theater of Houston). This non-profit organization has evolved into a Latino Cultural Arts Center that presents a full season of Performance Arts Series, Gallery Exhibits, programming for families through the Target Literacy program and the Flor y Canto summer art camp, plus a new program engaging the community with the environment title Planeta Verde Now. The center is located in the East End, a mile from downtown Houston. The renovated building is an 18,000-square-foot facility leased from the City of Houston Convention and Entertainment Facilities Department. The facility has a 240-seat theater, professional dance studio, rehearsal room, a gallery space, commercial kitchen and administrative offices. The facility was redeveloped with a \$992,000 Community Development Block Grant through the City of Houston Housing and Community Development Department in 1996. In 2002, the Board of Directors adopted a business plan prepared for the Cultural Arts Council of Houston and Harris County (CACHH) that targeted Talento Bilingüe de Houston as the appropriate agency in the City of Houston to develop itself further as a Latino Cultural Arts Center. The business plan succeeds by expanding programs that meet the needs of a diverse and growing Latino population that lives in Houston and those who visit the Houston Greater Area. The Center has also become a destination venue for other multicultural organizations.

Since its inception in 1955, Houston Grand Opera has swiftly grown from a small regional organization into an internationally renowned opera company. The company has a reputation for commissioning and producing new works, including 40 world premieres and six American premieres since 1973. In addition to producing and performing world-class opera, HGO contributes to the cultural enrichment of Houston and the nation through a diverse, innovative and balanced program of performances, events, community and education projects that reaches the widest possible public. HGO has toured extensively, including trips to Europe and Asia, and it is the only opera company to have won a Tony, two Grammy awards, and two Emmy awards. HGO's performances are broadcast nationally on the WFMT Radio Network.

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