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PRESS RELEASE

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**Houston Grand Opera Opens 57th Season on a High Note
Surplus Reported
Strong Ticket Sales Herald Additional Performance
Unions Ratify Contracts**

Houston, TX - October 17, 2011: Houston Grand Opera today announced that it will open its 57th season this Friday with record-breaking ticket sales and a surplus from the just-closed fiscal year 2011 on the books.

At its board meeting last week, the company reported a fiscal year-end surplus of \$37,000 (unaudited). Citing the success of the company's comprehensive campaign, which has brought over \$80 million in support to the company since it was launched just over four years ago, Managing Director Perryn Leech commented, "Prudent financial management coupled with extremely positive ticket sales for last season allowed the company to end its 56th season in a position of real strength." HGO sold 94% of its seating capacity in the 2010-11 season (up from 89% the previous year).

The company also reported a 3% increase in subscribed seats for the upcoming season, which is the fifth straight year of net growth in the company's subscriber base. In addition, the first day of single ticket sales (Monday, September 26) brought in more than \$50,000 – a 38% increase over last year's first-day sales. The company announced an additional performance of Verdi's *La Traviata* on February 8, 2012 in response to the demand.

Mr. Leech also announced to the Board that all the major performance unions had now ratified their multi-year contracts after successful negotiations. "The overall commitment from the entire workforce and the desire to build and grow this wonderful company into the future was very evident during the negotiations. I am extremely pleased that together with our chorus, orchestra, and technical employees, we can continue to place premium importance on our shared values – artistic excellence, relevance and affordability – as we work together to bring world-class opera to Houston, Texas and beyond."

Patrick Summers, the company's artistic and music director, commented on the company's recent triumph in Paris, where *Cruzar la Cara de la luna*, a Mariachi opera commissioned and premiered by HGO in November 2010, opened the season at the Chatelet Theater. "I am deeply proud of what Houston Grand Opera has achieved with *Cruzar*," said Summers. "This is a work of immediate and lasting impact on anyone who sees it." Commenting on the Paris performances of *Cruzar* for Classical TV, a reviewer said: "This was heartfelt, sophisticated, shockingly melodic music that is direct and brimming with emotions. . . At the end of this moving work, Théâtre du Châtelet shook with applause. You could hear weeping (I was not alone in getting teary-eyed), but most of all you heard the shouts of joy at the discovery of something wonderful and fresh." The recording of HGO's world premiere performance was released on October 1 on Albany Records.

"Last but not least," Leech stated, "We are enormously proud to have been singled out among Texas arts companies for an ArtsPlace grant, supporting HGOco's Home and Place initiative." The \$250,000 grant from a national consortium of funders, including the National Endowment for the Arts and The Mellon Foundation, allows HGOco to expand its creative activities into more neighborhoods. "This is a vote of confidence in HGOco and a tremendous honor for our company," said Board President Beth Madison, adding, "In addition to the many activities that bring HGO into Houston schools and neighborhoods, we look forward to welcoming the students from our Home and Place initiative, as well as many other schools, to our student matinee performances of *The Barber of Seville* in early November."

Houston Grand Opera opens its 2011-12 season on October 21 with a new production of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* starring Nathan Gunn, Ana María Martínez, and Lawrence Brownlee. Along with revivals of *Fidelio* (starring Karita Mattila and opening October 28), *La Traviata*, *Don Carlos*, and Donizetti's *Mary Stuart* (with Joyce DiDonato in the title role), HGO will present a new production of Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*.

Since its inception in 1955, Houston Grand Opera has grown from a small regional organization into an internationally renowned opera company. The company enjoys a reputation for commissioning and producing new works, including 44 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 and innovative program of performances, community events, 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 and internationally over the WFMT Radio Network, New York City's WQXR, the European Broadcasting Union and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.