

**Media Release**

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HoustonGrandOpera



# HOUSTON GRAND OPERA crosses the Atlantic

History-making Mariachi opera to open in Paris



May 5, 2011: **Houston Grand Opera General Director Anthony Freud** today announced that Houston Grand Opera will open the 2011-12 season at the prestigious Théâtre du Châtelet with six performances of **Cruzar la Cara de la Luna** (*To cross the Face of the Moon*) from September 23 - 27, 2011.

*Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*, the world's first Mariachi opera, was commissioned by Houston Grand Opera from composer and writer José "Pepe" Martínez, music director of Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, and acclaimed Broadway director and author Leonard Foglia.

"Kudos to HGO General Director, Anthony Freud....for taking a chance on something different and realizing the concept so expertly." -*Houston Chronicle*

"...a stunning, emotional work." -*Culture Map*

'Houston Grand Opera [still] embraces bold ventures.' -*New York Times*

Together with Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán - the world's pre-eminent mariachi ensemble - the Paris performances will include the HGO cast mezzo-soprano **Cecilia Duarte** and baritone and HGO studio alumnus **Octavio Moreno**.

The invitation to open the season at Théâtre du Châtelet, one of the most illustrious theaters in the world, follows sold out performances at the Wortham Center and Talento Bilingüe de Houston in 2010. Théâtre du Châtelet is renowned for showcasing original, compelling productions from around the globe, offering a platform to the many singers, musicians, actors and dancers who have forged new paths across the international arts landscape.

"Here at Houston Grand Opera we are dedicated to producing and presenting high quality, unique, risk-taking productions that challenge, engage and entertain," said Mr Freud. "We continue to build new connections with people in the community we serve, marrying our contemporary reality with their cultural heritage. Being invited to present this work at Théâtre du Châtelet is a fantastic achievement and everyone at HGO is proud to be involved."

Commissioned by Houston Grand Opera through its **Song of Houston: Mexico 2010** project in celebration of the anniversaries of Mexican independence and revolution, *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* was the brainchild of Mr. Freud. Watching a performance by Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, Freud 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," said 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 José "Pepe" Martínez to compose the score given how strongly he has influenced contemporary mariachi repertoire, and to Leonard Foglia, whose operatic style of storytelling and theatricality is his signature, to write his lyrics."

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(cont'd)

"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.

The captivating, poignant story set a new benchmark in operatic storytelling. Integrating real life stories with the magical and amazing migration of the monarch butterfly, *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* explores the migration of a Mexican family and their journey to United States, highlighting their sacrifice and loss.

### **History of Théâtre du Châtelet**

One of the biggest and most beautiful theaters in Paris with its 2000 seats, Théâtre du Châtelet has played a prominent role in the history of music and performance for the past 150 years. Inaugurated in 1862 in the very heart of the city, Théâtre du Châtelet has been opening its doors to a wide range of disciplines from its beginnings. From fantasy plays to opera, musicals or concerts, its stage has welcomed many of the great performers of the 19th and 20th centuries. Composers such as Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Richard Strauss and Debussy conducted their own work there. Gustav Mahler gave his first French concert as the head of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra in the Grand Auditorium and ballet dancers Tamara Karsavina, Anna Pavlova and Vaslav Nijinsky showed their prowess at the turn of the 20th century performing for the first time outside of Russia at the Théâtre du Châtelet.

### **Biographies**

Music by: José "Pepe" Martinez

Lyrics by: José "Pepe" Martinez and Leonard Foglia

Book by Leonard Foglia

**Anthony Freud** was appointed as Houston Grand Opera's third General Director and first CEO in July 2005. Acclaimed new productions and co-productions have been central to Freud's work at Houston Grand Opera; these have included of Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, Verdi's *Aida* and Wagner's *Lohengrin*; the world premiere performances and recordings of Christopher Theofanidis's *The Refuge*, Jake Heggie's *Last Acts*, and André Previn's *Brief Encounter*; and the launch of a multi-year series of the operas of Benjamin Britten.

Another highlight of Freud's tenure at Houston Grand Opera has been the establishment of HGOco – a groundbreaking initiative to establish dynamic and evolving relationships with communities throughout the city, which has reached more than 600,000 people during its first three years of activities. In 2009, its Song of Houston program won the Leading Lights Diversity Award from the National MultiCultural Institute. In 2008, he established the NEXUS Initiative, an audience development program that provides underwriting for free and affordably-priced performances for new audiences. Mr. Freud was recently named General Director of Lyric Opera of Chicago commencing October 2011.

**José "Pepe" Martínez** (Composer) 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. Today, Martínez continues writing, learning, performing and breaking new ground in the creation of Mariachi music as Music Director of the ensemble. *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* (*To Cross the Face of the Moon*) is his first opera.

**Leonard Foglia** (Director, Librettist) 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; *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), *Last Acts* (2009) and *Dead Man Walking* (2010).

**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 José Alfredo Jimenez. Mariachi Vargas has toured the world and shared its music with people of all cultures on more than 800 recordings.

Mezzo-soprano **Cecilia Duarte** is a native of Chihuahua, Mexico, and made her solo debut at HGO as Renata in *To Cross the Face of the Moon*. She has been a member of Houston Grand Opera's touring company *Opera to Go!* since 2007. Ms. Duarte also performs Storybook Opera in Spanish throughout the Houston area. Her musical career began in Mexico, where she performed in many musical theater productions, creating roles in numerous world premieres both written and directed by composer Alberto Espino.

Baritone **Octavio Moreno**, a recent Houston Grand Opera Studio alumnus, has performed with HGO in *The Queen of Spades*, *The Elixir of Love* and *Rigoletto*, during the past two seasons. Originally from Mexico, Mr. Moreno won third place in the 2008 Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers and sang on behalf of Mexico in the 2009 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition.

**Performance Details:**

Dates: September 23 – 27, 2011

Times: 23th @ 8pm, 24th @ 3pm + 8pm, 25th @ 4pm, 26th @ 8pm, 27th @ 8pm.

Venue: Théâtre du Châtelet

, 1 Place du Châtelet, 75001 Paris.

Ticketing + Information: 01 40 28 28 40.

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