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Houston Grand Opera Appoints Associate Music Director

Solti Award-winner Eric Melear will be Summers's "Right Hand"

Houston, TX, June 16, 2011: **Houston Grand Opera** Artistic and Music Director **Patrick Summers** today announced the appointment of **Eric Melear** as Associate Music Director, a newly-created position. The 2006 recipient of the Sir Georg Solti Foundation Award, Melear returns to Houston Grand Opera after a year on the music staff of the Wiener Staatsoper (Vienna State Opera), where he assisted on fourteen productions and conducted two children's operas. Previously, he was Associate Conductor/Assistant Chorus master with Houston Grand Opera and served as Head of Music Staff and Studio Manager at Wolf Trap Opera.

As Associate Music Director, Mr. Melear will support Mr. Summers by conducting, coaching and accompanying singers and managing music staff. He will serve as Music Director of the Houston Grand Opera Studio. "Eric will be my right hand," said Mr. Summers, "and most importantly will oversee the selection and pedagogy of the young artists of the renowned Houston Grand Opera Studio. Eric is a peerless musician and colleague, and his presence in the company will be a tremendous calling-card for the talented young singers and coaches who seek to complete their professional training in Houston. I am excited and honored that he has accepted the position and I look forward to our artistic work together."

"I have long felt fortunate to call Houston Grand Opera my musical home, and I am thrilled to return at this pivotal time for the company," commented Mr. Melear. "I look forward to working alongside Patrick Summers, the new leadership team, and HGO's unparalleled staff to continue to uphold the high artistic standards that set this company apart."

While at the Wiener Staatsoper, Mr. Melear conducted performances of Iván Eröd's *Pünktchen und Anton* and Wilfried Hiller's *Das Traumfresserchen*. He assisted conductors Franz Welser-Möst, Bruno Campanella, Graeme Jenkins, and others, and worked with singers such as Vivica Genaux, Michele Pertusi, and Ildebrando d'Arcangelo, as well as coaching the renowned Staatsoper Ensemble singers. During Mr. Melear's previous eight seasons with Houston Grand Opera, he conducted performances of *Tosca*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *Rigoletto*, *Beatrice and Benedict*, *Aida*, *Carmen*, and *Le nozze di Figaro*. He assisted Patrick Summers, Carlo Rizzi, and Edoardo Müller and led the workshop of Jake Heggie's *Three Decembers*, in addition to preparing two other world premieres. As Assistant Chorusmaster, he worked closely with the HGO Chorus on many productions, including *Lohengrin*, *Cavalleria Rusticana/I Pagliacci*, and *Chorus!* In addition to working regularly with the celebrated HGO Studio, he also performed in recital with Teddy Tahu Rhodes, Ana María Martínez, and Chad Shelton.

Mr. Melear made his conducting debut in 2005 with Oregon Lyric Opera's *La Traviata* and subsequently served as their Resident Conductor. In 2006 the Sir Georg Solti Foundation honored him with its prestigious award for young conductors. Consequently, he traveled to London to study with the late Sir Charles Mackerras, to Ann Arbor to study with Gustav Meier, to San Francisco to shadow Patrick Summers on Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, and to Siena to intensively study Italian. In 2008 he conducted a gala performance with the Los Angeles Opera Domingo-Thornton Young Artists. At Wolf Trap Opera he led new productions of *Alcina* in 2008 and *Il Turco in Italia* in 2010, for which he received praise in *Opera News*: "Conductor Eric Melear always allowed room for lyrical phrases to bloom...But above all, he emphasized momentum and sparkle. The performance went by in a flash."

As Head of Music Staff and Studio Manager at Wolf Trap Opera, Mr. Melear assisted Director Kim Witman in auditioning singers and determining the season's repertoire, and was instrumental in developing the Studio Program for young singers. In his eight seasons there, he served as chorus master for nine productions, assisted Stephen Lord on *Carmen* and *La bohème* with the National Symphony Orchestra, and prepared regular season productions.

A native of Moline, Illinois, Mr. Melear was a member of the Houston Grand Opera Studio and San Francisco Opera's Merola Program. His studies also included graduate work with esteemed pianist Martin Katz at the University of Michigan and a double major in music and math from Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa.

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Founded in 1955, Houston Grand Opera is an internationally-renowned opera company with a reputation for commissioning and producing new works, including 43 world premieres and six American premieres since 1973. 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, and internationally via the European Broadcast Union.