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PRESS RELEASE

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Houston Grand Opera 2012–13 season announced

Company Adds Seventh Production, Subscription Series; Audience Growth Cited Important Debuts Include Stemme, Heppner in *Tristan and Isolde* Two New Operas commissioned for *Song of Houston: East + West*

Houston, TX — January 26, 2012: Houston Grand Opera Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers and Managing Director Perryn Leech announced the company's program for the 2012–13 season. The season features seven operas on the company's main stage, including four new productions, as well as two newly-commissioned operas for the company's award-winning *Song of Houston* project. "Each of our operas has a magnificent cast and each is presented in an imaginative and compelling production," said Summers.

2012–13 Houston Grand Opera Season

- **Puccini: *La bohème****
October 19 – November 10, 2012
- **Rossini: *The Italian Girl in Algiers****
October 26 – November 11, 2012
- ***Song of Houston– East + West: Korean Opera***
November 3, 2012
- **Kern / Hammerstein: *Show Boat****
January 18 – February 9, 2013
- **Mozart: *Don Giovanni***
January 25 – February 10, 2013
- **Martinez / Foglia: *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna***
March 22–24, 2013
- **Wagner: *Tristan and Isolde****
April 18 – May 5, 2013
- **Verdi: *Il trovatore***
April 26 – May 11, 2013
- ***Song of Houston – East + West: Japan Opera***
Dates and Location TBA, April 2013

*New Production

The company has added a full subscription series and several single-ticket performances to the 2012–13 season, bringing the total number of performances to forty-four, an increase of thirty-seven percent over the last several seasons. “Our subscription audience has increased significantly over the past six years, as have our single ticket sales. Contrary to the trend among opera companies right now, Houston Grand Opera is growing,” Summers stated. “Our audiences are enjoying the quality of the artistic experience we offer them. In adding performances, we are responding to increased demand, and that is thrilling.”

Managing Director Perryn Leech noted, “Our main goal in planning a season is to deliver brilliant performances. It is exciting to add dates to our calendar and to bring more opera to the city we serve, and we want to provide a magnificent experience every time. We are committed to engaging the most interesting and important artists of our time – conductors, singers, directors, and designers – to create great opera with us in Houston.”

On **October 19**, the season opens with a new production of the perennial favorite, Puccini’s *La bohème*, directed by award-winning British director John Caird, who has been named the Lynn Wyatt Great Artist for the 2012–13 season. “This new production is John Caird at his best,” said Leech. “He brings Bohemian Paris and the beloved inhabitants of an artist’s loft to life, creating an atmosphere that comes straight out of the world of Toulouse-Lautrec.” American soprano Katie Van Kooten sings the role of Mimi, which she did to great acclaim at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden last year, while New York native Dimitri Pittas sings Rodolfo. Vuyani Mlinde makes his company debut as Colline, and the cast features HGO Studio alumni Heidi Stober as Musetta, Joshua Hopkins as Marcello, and Michael Sumuel as Schaunard, as well as conductor Evan Rogister. A conducting protégée of Patrick Summers, he is at the start of a major career, having just completed two seasons at Berlin’s prestigious Deutsche Oper.

Summers said, “Planning a season is like planning a great seven-course meal. In our case, the dessert – and it’s a great one, a real soufflé – is *The Italian Girl in Algiers*.” Rossini’s comic masterpiece opens on **October 26**. Making her HGO debut in the title role will be Italian mezzo-soprano, Daniela Barcellona. Tenor Lawrence Brownlee, who wowed audiences in *The Barber of Seville*, returns in the role of Lindoro. Renowned Italian conductor Carlo Rizzi (*Aida*, 2007; *Queen of Spades*, 2010) returns to lead the performances. The production completes a trio of Rossini comedies (including *Cinderella* and *The Barber of Seville*, shown at HGO in 2007 and 2011, respectively) and is the creation of the acclaimed Spanish creative team of director Joan Font and designer Joan Guillén.

On **January 18**, HGO will present a new production of *Show Boat* by renowned opera and Broadway director, Francesca Zambello. This landmark work, with its powerful subject matter, epic scope, and romantic score will give audiences a rich experience of uniquely American traditions of music-making, and will be conducted by Patrick Summers. Summers said, “*Show Boat* is one of a handful of classic American musicals which greatly benefit from the resources of an opera company in having a full orchestra and a fine chorus along with operatic voices capable of delivering this music in a natural way. Kern and Hammerstein wished for *Show Boat* to bridge the worlds of opera and musical theater and we are reflecting that aesthetic.”

Show Boat features company debuts by a quartet of major young American artists. Singing Magnolia is mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke, who created a sensation in New York with her performances in John Adams’s *Doctor Atomic*. Gaylord Ravenal, the irresistible rogue, will be sung by Canadian tenor Joseph Kaiser. Melody Moore is Julie; bass Morris Robinson is Joe. HGO Studio alumna Marietta Simpson makes a welcome return in the role of Queenie.

Mozart's *Don Giovanni* opens on **January 25**. Led by the distinguished veteran British conductor, master harpsichordist and musicologist Trevor Pinnock in his long-awaited HGO debut, the production features the company debut of Austrian baritone Adrian Eröd in the title role, and the return to HGO of bass Kyle Ketelson (Leporello) and HGO Studio alumna, soprano Rachel Willis-Sørensen (Donna Anna). Morris Robinson sings the Commendatore, with company debuts by Joel Prieto (Don Ottavio), Malin Christensson (Zerlina) and Veronika Dzioeva (Donna Elvira). "It is a pleasure to welcome Trevor Pinnock to HGO – and to know how much our cast, orchestra, and audience will benefit from the presence of this great and accomplished master-musician, who brings a lifetime of experience to his first performances of this particular Mozart opera," said Summers. Harry Silverstein will direct the acclaimed production by the late Goran Järvefelt with designs by Carl Friedrich Oberle.

Starting on **March 22**, HGO will present four performances of *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna / To Cross the Face of the Moon*. Commissioned by Houston Grand Opera as part of its award-winning *Song of Houston* project, this mariachi opera was composed by José "Pepe" Martínez with a libretto by Leonard Foglia, and premiered in Houston in 2010 with HGO's cast and the acclaimed Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán. In September 2011, HGO presented the opera to great acclaim at the famed Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, and the CD was released by Albany records in October 2011. Perryn Leech noted, "*Cruzar* tells a story that speaks to anyone who has roots in a place other than that which they now call home. It is a fantastically moving, dramatic account of three generations of a family dealing with the impact of immigration. As such, it is the perfect story for so many, not only in Houston but throughout the US and around the world. We are very excited to be reviving it as part of our 2012-13 season."

On **April 18**, an uncompromising new production of Wagner's searing *Tristan and Isolde* directed by Christof Loy will premiere. "Loy is an extraordinary director who has taken an innovative and very rewarding approach to this incredibly complex, emotionally-shattering opera," said Leech. "It's a *Tristan* that will resonate with contemporary society." Summers, who will conduct, commented, "*Tristan and Isolde* is a work that changed the course of Western music history. The legendary title roles will be sung by soprano Nina Stemme and tenor Ben Heppner, both making their HGO debuts. There is no finer pair of artists for this opera, and we are thrilled to welcome them to HGO for the first time." They will lead a cast which also features the company debuts of Claudia Mahnke and Christof Fischesser.

Completing the season will be Verdi's opera of fate and vengeance, *Il trovatore*, opening on **April 26**. Featuring sublime choral moments such as the famous "Anvil" Chorus, it stars a quartet of the finest Verdian singers on the stage today: HGO Studio alumna Tamara Wilson (Leonora), Marco Berti (Manrico), Dolora Zajick (Azucena), and Tómas Tómasson (Count di Luna). Summers noted, "The year 2013 is the bicentennial of the birth of both Verdi and Wagner. They were geniuses of their respective genres, but no two men could have been more different personally or artistically. Having *Il trovatore*, one of Verdi's early blood-and-thunder operatic warhorses playing at the same time as *Tristan and Isolde* seemed to us a great way to celebrate an important anniversary of two titanic figures of Western art."

"I am pleased to say that we are able to continue two priority initiatives in our 2012-13 season," continued Summers. "Through HGOco and our NEXUS Initiative, we bring all the resources of our company to the table to serve our community with opportunities to observe, create, and participate in art."

HGOco's *Song of Houston*, an ongoing initiative to commission works based on stories that define the unique character of our city and its diverse cultures, continues with two new "East + West" commissions celebrating the Korean and Japanese communities. Composed by Jeeyoung Kim with a libretto by Jane Koh, the Korean opera will premiere during Houston's Korean Festival on November 3, 2012; details of the Japanese opera commission are being finalized and will be formally announced shortly. In 2009, *Song of Houston* earned the Leading Lights Diversity Award in Arts and Culture from the National MultiCultural Institute.

Additionally, HGOco's *Home and Place* project, which recently received a \$250,000 grant from the public-private ArtPlace consortium, will continue to bring creative opportunities to schools and community centers throughout Houston.

The company's NEXUS Initiative encourages a large and diverse audience to attend the opera by underwriting specially-priced tickets, student matinees, free community performances, and broadcasts of HGO performances. The NEXUS Initiative is made possible through the ongoing generous support of The Houston Endowment, Anadarko Petroleum Corporation, Schlumberger Oilfield Services, The Brown Foundation, Inc, The Wortham Foundation, Inc., Nabors Industries, and The Honorable Peter and Anne S. Brown.

Leech stated, "Here in Houston, with the wonderful support of our board, trustees, donors, and of far-sighted foundations and corporations, we have a unique opportunity to contribute to the cultural life of our city in ways that will impact the quality of life here for many generations."

Summers said, "The outmoded cultural clichés which often plague the arts can only be successfully broken down with dynamic programs like the NEXUS Initiative and HGOco, which together open doors to our vibrant art form of opera by making it affordable and accessible to a broad, diverse and growing audience."

In closing, Summers remarked, "If you are curious about opera, classical music, singing, or about theatrical literature – we're here for that and more. We are a company richly gifted in talent and experience in the disciplines that it takes to make opera, and we are eager to share the fruits of our labor with you. If you're curious about these things, Houston Grand Opera is the place for you."

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 reach 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.

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