

PRESS RELEASE

HoustonGrandOpera



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Houston Grand Opera to Present its Premiere Staging of Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict*

HOUSTON – **Houston Grand Opera (HGO)** continues the 2008–2009 season with Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict*, based on Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, in the Brown Theater at the Wortham Theater Center. The production opens on **October 30, 2008**, with performances continuing through November 14, 2008.

The HGO premiere staging of *Beatrice and Benedict* will open under the HGO directorial debut of **Robin Tebbutt**, former staff director for the Welsh National Opera and Glyndebourne Opera Festival. Regarded as “elegant, unaffected, and charming” by *Opera News*, HGO Studio alumna **Joyce DiDonato** (HGO's *La Cenerentola* 2007) returns as the sharp-witted and sarcastic Beatrice. The role of Benedict will be sung by HGO Studio alumnus **Norman Reinhardt** (HGO's *Marriage of Figaro* 2006). HGO Studio alumni **Ryan McKinny** and **Liam Bonner** (HGO's *Billy Budd* 2007) return to HGO as Benedict's conspiring friends Don Pedro and Claudio. **Ailish Tynan** makes her HGO debut as Hero, the lovestruck daughter of Leonato and **Leann Sandel-Pantaleo** makes her HGO debut as Beatrice's lady in waiting, Ursula. Sets and costumes are designed by Tony Award-winning American designer **Michael Yeagan**. **Michael Hofstetter** will conduct the **Houston Grand Opera Orchestra** and **Chorus** in his HGO debut.

Beatrice and Benedict opens on Thursday, October 30, 2008 at 7:30 p.m. in the Brown Theater at the Wortham Center. Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m.; Sunday matinee at 2:00 p.m. *Beatrice and Benedict* will be performed in English with English supertitles.

Related Events:

Taste This! HGO at The Tasting Room

October 6, 2008 at 6:00 p.m. The Tasting Room (Uptown Park Location)

A cabaret-style performance featuring the artists of Houston Grand Opera Studio performing music inspired by the works of Shakespeare.

Tickets to this event are \$20 and include hors d'oeuvres, but seating is very limited so please reserve your tickets by calling The Tasting Room Events Line at 713-622-4477.

Houston Grand Opera Guild Opera Night Live

October 7, 2008 at 7:30 p.m. Czech Center Museum Houston (4920 San Jacinto Street)

Enjoy a conversation with Robin Tebbutt, director of *Beatrice and Benedict*, plus a special "Bea and Ben" musical preview featuring HGO Studio artists.

This event is free, but space is limited so please reserve your seat by calling Houston Grand Opera Guild at 713-546-0269.

Coffee Talk

October 15, 2008 at 6 p.m. University of St Thomas Jones Hall

Houston Grand Opera and the University of St. Thomas present the first in a series of informal conversations on the connections between life and art. HGOco Director Sandra Bernhard joins with UST faculty to discuss "How Shakespeare Sees the World."

Free and open to the public; for more information call 713-228-OPERA(6737).

About the opera:

Beatrice and Benedict is an opera in two acts by Hector Berlioz with a libretto adapted by the composer in French from Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. *Beatrice and Benedict* was the composer's final composition and only comedy. It was first performed in Baden-Baden on August 9, 1862, with the composer conducting. It was an immense success at its premiere, however is not often performed these days. *Beatrice and Benedict* is an example of French Opéra-Comique, a comic work comprised of musical numbers interspersed with sections of spoken dialogue. The English translations in the HGO production are by Geoffrey Dunn as adapted from Shakespeare by Elijah Moshinsky.

About the artists:

American soprano **Joyce DiDonato** makes her role debut as Beatrice in *Beatrice and Benedict*. Last seen at Houston Grand Opera as Angelina in Rossini's *La Cenerentola* in 2007, Joyce DiDonato is an alumnus of the Houston Grand Opera Studio. Ms DiDonato's other Houston Grand Opera appearances include Fydor in Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (1997), Cherubina in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* (1998), Kate Pinkerton in Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* (1998), Katerina Maslova in Machover's world premiere of *Resurrection* (1999), Meg in Adamo's *Little Women* (2000), Dorabella in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (2001), and Rosina in Rossini's *Barber of Seville* (2004). In addition to appearing on the world's major opera stages she has given recitals and concerts at London's Wigmore Hall, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, and New York's Carnegie Hall, and has appeared with the New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Orchestre National de Paris, St. Luke's Chamber Orchestra and St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. Ms. DiDonato has had important triumphs at the Rossini Festival in Pesaro and in performances and recordings with Alan Curtis's ensemble, Il Complesso Barocco and William Christie and Les Arts Florissants. Joyce DiDonato gave her Metropolitan Opera debut as Cherubino in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, sang her role debut as Sesto in Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito* at the Geneva Opera, and returned to Covent Garden as Rosina in a new production of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. Ms. DiDonato has received the Royal Philharmonic Society's Singer of the Year award, the Metropolitan Opera's Beverly Sills Award, the Royal Philharmonic Society's Singer of the Year; the Richard Tucker Award, given to a single American singer annually; second place in Plácido Domingo's *Operalia*, prizes from the George London Foundation, the ARIA Award Foundation, and the Sullivan Foundation.

An alumnus of the Houston Grand Opera Studio, American tenor **Norman Reinhardt** makes his role debut as Benedict in *Beatrice and Benedict*. At HGO he has sung the roles of The Emperor in Puccini's *Turandot* (2004), The Drunkard in

Natalie Portman's *The Little Prince* (2004), Arbace in Mozart's *Idomeneo* (2005), Meleagros in Adamo's *Lysistrata* (2005), and Don Basilio in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* (2006). A veteran of many competitions, Mr. Reinhardt was the district winner and regional runner-up of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 2000 and 2002. In 2003, he won first place in the Adult Division of the Orpheus Vocal Competition and he was a finalist in the Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers. He has sung the roles of Brighella in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* and Jaquino in Beethoven's *Leonore* at the Teatro Real Madrid, Tamino in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Ernesto in Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* at Opera Colorado, Alfredo in Verdi's *La Traviata* at Opéra National de Lille, the role of Ferrando in Mozart's *Così fan Tutte* for the Israeli Opera and the Santa Fe Opera, and Belmonte in Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* at Boston Lyric Opera. This season, Mr Reinhardt will return to Houston Grand Opera as Lysander in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Irish Soprano **Ailish Tynan** makes her HGO debut as Hero in *Beatrice and Benedict*. Ms. Tynan was born in Mullingar, Ireland, and studied at Trinity College and the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London. In 2003 Ms. Tynan represented Ireland in the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition, winning the Rosenblatt Recital Prize. Other awards include the Maggie Teyte Competition/Miriam Licette Award and the RTE Millennium Singer of the Future. As a member of the former Vilar Young Artist Programme at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, she performed Papagena in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, First Niece in Britten's *Peter Grimes*, Xenia in Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* and Second Wood Nymph in Dvorak's *Rusalka*. Other roles of note include Valencienne in Lehar's *The Merry Widow* and Susanna in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* for Welsh National Opera, Euridice in Monteverdi's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and Pamina in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* for Opera Ireland, Flora in Tippett's *The Knot Garden* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Andrew Davis, Aenchen in Weber's *Der Freischütz* at the Edinburgh International Festival conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras and Marzelline in Beethoven's *Fidelio* with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland in Dublin. In 2006 Ms. Tynan made her US debut as Zerlina in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* for the Seattle Opera. Concert highlights include a televised program of music by Mozart with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra conducted by Sir Roger Norrington at the 2006 BBC Proms, *Carmina Burana* with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Daniele Gatti, Barber's *Knoxville Summer of 1915* with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Mahler's *Symphony No 4* with the Hallé Orchestra conducted by Martyn Brabbins at the Cheltenham Music Festival, Canteloube's *Songs of the Auvergne* with the Ulster Orchestra and Ravel's *Scheherazade* with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra. She has given recitals at the Edinburgh International Festival, City of London Festival, Cheltenham Music Festival, West Cork Music Festival, Wigmore Hall and St John's Smith Square, London. Ms. Tynan will make her European debut this year as Sophie in Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier* for the Royal Swedish Opera.

American mezzo-soprano **Leann Sandel-Pantaleo** makes her HGO debut as Ursula in *Beatrice and Benedict*. Roles of note include Amneris in Verdi's *Aida* with both Portland Opera and El Paso Opera, Siegrune in Wagner's *Die Walküre* and Flora in Verdi's *La Traviata* at The Metropolitan Opera (Met debut), the title role in Bizet's *Carmen* with Chautauqua Opera and Santuzza in Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* with PORT Opera in Maine. She has joined the Metropolitan Opera company for numerous concert productions in Central Park including *Die Ägyptische Helena*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Luisa Miller*, *Manon*, *Parsifal*, and *Die Walküre*. Also included in her previous operatic experience are performances with Michigan Opera Theatre, Indianapolis Opera, West Coast Lyric Opera, Starlight Theater, Caramoor Music Festival, New Amsterdam Opera and San Diego Comic Opera. A frequent oratorio soloist as well, the mezzo has appeared with many symphony orchestras, including Indianapolis, Alabama, Erie, Pacific, Nevada, La Jolla, Evansville, San Diego, Westchester, and Lafayette. Ms. Sandel-Pantaleo won the Herbert Cohen Award in the Oratorio Society of New York's Annual Solo Competition and prize winner in the Friedrich Schorr Competition winner, Musical Merit of San Diego Competition, and Virginia Hawk Competition winner. A graduate of Indiana University, Ms. Sandel-Pantaleo completed an apprenticeship with Michigan Opera Theatre and worked with the American Cabaret Theatre. Ms. Sandel-Pantaleo returns to HGO to sing the part of Hippolyta in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Robin Tebbutt is making his HGO debut as director for *Beatrice and Benedict*. Mr. Tebbutt was born in Suffolk, Great Britain and he studied music and drama at the University of Birmingham. He was staff director at Glyndebourne, which led him to direct revivals of Sir Peter Hall's production of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* for Los Angeles Opera, Chicago Lyric Opera and Wolftrap. He was staff director for Welsh National Opera for 15 years where he directed revivals of Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict*, Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, Verdi's *Rigoletto* and *La Traviata*, Bizet's *Carmen*, and Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. He has directed a number of community projects, including a production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* for children. Recent highlights include working with Katie Mitchell on her production of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* at Glyndebourne, the world premiere of *The Sacrifice* by James Macmillan at WNO and the revival of Peter Stein's production of Verdi's *Falstaff* starring Bryn Terfel.

Richard Bado is marking his twenty-first season as Houston Grand Opera's chorus master. He made his professional conducting debut in 1989 leading HGO's acclaimed production of *Show Boat* at the newly restored Cairo Opera House in Egypt. Since then, Mr. Bado has conducted at Teatro alla Scala, Opéra National de Paris, Houston Grand Opera, New York City Opera, the Aspen Music Festival, the Tulsa Opera, the Florida Philharmonic, the Montreal Symphony, Wolf Trap

Opera and Houston Ballet, and has conducted the Robert Wilson production of Virgil Thomsen's *Four Saints in Three Acts* at the Edinburgh Festival. He appears regularly in recital with Renée Fleming and has also accompanied Cecilia Bartoli, Frederica von Stade, Denyce Graves, Susan Graham, Marcello Giordani, Ramón Vargas, Samuel Ramey and Nathan Gunn. Mr. Bado, who holds music degrees from the Eastman School of Music, where he received the 2000 Alumni Achievement Award, and West Virginia University, studied advanced choral conducting with the late Robert Shaw. Mr. Bado is Director of the Opera Studies program at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music. He was Houston Grand Opera's head of music staff for fourteen seasons.

Michael Yeargan (set and costume designer) has designed extensively for regional theatres in America, London's West End, Broadway and off-Broadway. His designs for Lucus/Guettel's musical *The Light in the Piazza* were awarded the Tony Award, the Drama Desk Award and the Henry Hewes Award. Work for Lincoln Center Theater includes Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, the acclaimed revival of Edward Albee's *Seascape*, directed by Mark Lamos, the revival of Clifford Odets's *Awake and Sing* directed by Barlett Sher, for which he won the Drama Desk Award and received his second Tony nomination, and the newly revived *South Pacific*. Yeargan's opera credits are equally extensive in America and abroad including the world premieres of André Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking* for San Francisco Opera and John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby* for the Met. Additionally he has designed for Covent Garden in London (*Attila*, *Simon Boccanegra*, *Stiffelio*, *Aida*), Glimmerglass (*Central Park*, *La Finta Giardiniera*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Tosca*), Gran Teatre del Liceu (*I Puritani*), Lyric Opera of Chicago (*Pirates of Penzance*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Attila*, *Susannah*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Nabucco*) and Florida Grand Opera (*La Finta Giardiniera*). He most recently designed the new production of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* for Washington National Opera and San Francisco Opera. He is a Professor of Stage Design at the Yale School of Drama. Michael Yeargan's designs will also be featured in the HGO 2008-09 season productions of *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Pagliacci* and *Rigoletto*.

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Performance Summary

All performances of Houston Grand Opera's production of Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict* are held in the Wortham Center's Brown Theater, Texas Avenue at Smith Street, Houston, TX.

Sung in English with English supertitles.

Performance Dates

Thursday, October 30, 2008 at 7:30 p.m. *

Sunday, November 2, 2008 at 2:00 p.m.

Saturday, November 8, 2008 at 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 12, 2008 at 7:30 p.m.

Friday, November 14, 2008 at 7:30 p.m.

*ON for Young Professionals reception and performance

Ticket Information:

- Season tickets are on sale now starting at \$67.50 for all six operas. Individual tickets for *Beatrice and Benedict* go on sale October 1, 2008 and start at \$20 (inclusive of all city surcharges)
- The Wortham Theater Center features wheelchair access to both theaters, with a choice of seating locations and ticket prices. An infrared listening system, underwritten by Shell Lubricants, is available and free of charge at all performances. Disabled access and TDD: 713-228-OPERA (6737) or 1-800-62-OPERA (800-626-7372); Descriptive Services: 713-546-0675.
- The **Wells Fargo Pre-Curtain Lecture Series** takes place forty-five minutes before each performance. Guest speakers present a twenty-minute informal lecture in the orchestra level of the Brown Theater. These lectures, free and open to all ticket holders, are intended to enhance the audience's enjoyment by preparing them for the opera they are about to attend.

Since its inception in 1955, Houston Grand Opera has become an internationally renowned opera company. With a reputation for commissioning and producing new works (38 world premieres and seven American premieres since 1973) as well as reaching out to new audiences. HGO has toured extensively, including trips to Europe and Asia, and it is the only opera company to have won a Tony, two Grammy, and two Emmy awards. Houston Grand Opera's productions are broadcast on the WFMT Radio Network, as well as through the European Broadcasting Union and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.