

HoustonGrandOpera



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## Houston Grand Opera Presents Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

HGO CONTINUES ITS BRITTEN CYCLE WITH A NEW PRODUCTION BY AWARD WINNING DIRECTOR NEIL ARMFIELD.  
OPENS FRIDAY, JANUARY 23, 2009

HOUSTON—**Houston Grand Opera** (HGO) continues its 54<sup>th</sup> season with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, British composer Benjamin Britten's masterful setting of William Shakespeare's play of the same name. Following HGO's acclaimed production of *Billy Budd* last season, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the second opera in a multi-year series of works by Britten. "Benjamin Britten's operas continue the great line of central operatic creations from Monteverdi in the 17<sup>th</sup> century through Mozart, Handel, Verdi, Wagner, Strauss and Janáček," explained HGO General Director **Anthony Freud**. "In embarking on a Britten series, we are working to introduce our audiences, on a long-term and ongoing basis, to a group of works that deserves to be at the very heart of the operatic repertoire." HGO will present a series of Britten operas through the 2012–13 season, which marks the centennial of the composer's birth.

"Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seems to do the impossible; it weds 20<sup>th</sup>-century music to a 16<sup>th</sup>-century play, cuts the text in half, and creates an enjoyable and wholly different work," said HGO Music Director **Patrick Summers**, who will conduct *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. "It is a story of metamorphosis and transcendence, which deals with the dueling perceptions of reality and fantasy."

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which was last performed at HGO in 1993, returns to the Wortham Theater Center in a new production by Australian director **Neil Armfield**, who also directed HGO's *Billy Budd*. Welsh countertenor **Iestyn Davies** will make his company debut as Oberon, king of the fairies, and his queen, Tytania will be sung by Houston favorite soprano **Laura Claycomb** (Marie in HGO's *Daughter of the Regiment*, 2007). Studio alumni **Norman Reinhardt** (Benedict in HGO's *Beatrice and Benedict*, 2008) will sing the role of Lysander, **Liam Bonner** (Claudio in HGO's *Beatrice and Benedict*, 2008) will sing Demetrius and **Marie Lenormand** (Siebel in HGO's *Faust*,

2007) will sing Hermia. Making their company debuts, Soprano **Katie van Kooten** sing the role of Helena and British bass-baritone **Matthew Rose** will sing his much acclaimed role of Bottom.

HGO Music Director and Conductor **Patrick Summers** leads the cast with the the HGO Orchestra and Chorus. (**Richard Bado**, HGO Chorus Master). Sets and costumes are designed by Australian **Dale Ferguson** and lighting design is by Australian **Damien Cooper**. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a co-production with the Canadian Opera Company.

Sung in English with English supertitles, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* opens on Friday, January 23, 2009 at 7:30 p.m. in the Brown Theater at the Wortham Theater Center.

#### **About the opera:**

The libretto, based on William Shakespeare's play of the same name, was adapted by the composer and Peter Pears. The opera closely follows the plot and language of the original play with the exception of the opening scene, which takes place in the forest and not in the city of Athens. It had a successful premiere at the Aldeburgh Festival on June 11, 1960 and was quickly programmed by other companies. In 1961 the opera was seen at Covent Garden, Hamburg, Berlin, Milan, San Francisco, Zürich, and Tokyo.

#### **About the artists:**

Countertenor **Iestyn Davies** (Oberon) makes his HGO debut with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Since his operatic debut as Ottone in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* for Zürich Opera, operatic roles have included Hamor in Handel's *Jephtha* and Pisandro in Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* for Welsh National Opera, the solo counter-tenor in Purcell's *King Arthur* and Apollo in Britten's *Death in Venice* for English National Opera, Azul in Nadair's *Madrugada* for the Schleswig-Holstein Festival and Corrado in Vivaldi's *Griselda* in Paris and Brest. Appearances at the Wigmore Hall, The Barbican, Concertgebouw, Snape Maltings and Théâtre des Champs-Élysées have included performances of Britten's *Canticles*, Bach's Mass in B Minor and Handel's *Messiah* and *Flavio*. He has sung with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Academy of Ancient Music, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Recent recordings include Handel's *Messiah* for Naxos Records with the Academy of Ancient and Vivaldi's *Griselda* for Naïve Records, which won BBC Music Magazine's "Opera Recording of the Year 2007". Mr. Davies studied Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge, where he was a choral scholar at St John's College, before pursuing his vocal studies at the Royal Academy of Music.

Texas native soprano **Laura Claycomb** (Tytania) was last seen at HGO as Marie in Donizetti's *Daughter of the Regiment* (2007). Houston audiences will also recall her performances from HGO's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala, as Ilia in Mozart's *Idomeneo* (2005), Cleopatra in Handel's *Julius Caesar* (2003), Lucia in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (2003) and Gilda in Verdi's *Rigoletto* (2001). She made her debut at La Scala in 1998 singing the title role in Donizetti's *Linda di Chamounix* and at the Salzburg Festival in 1997 as Amanda in Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre*. Other significant opera roles include Comtesse Adèle in Rossini's *Le comte Ory* (Lausanne), Ginevra in Händel's *Ariodante* (Paris Opera and Munich Opera), Cunegonde in Bernstein's *Candide* (Opera Pacific), Sophie in Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* (Spoleto Festival), Konstanze in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (Staatsoper Berlin and Vlaamse Opera), Olympia in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (Vlaamse Opera), the title-role in *Semele* (Vlaamse Opera) and Queen Wealthew in the world premiere of Elliot Goldenthal's *Grendel* (Los Angeles Opera and at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York). She has delighted audiences in recital in San Francisco, San Antonio, Chicago, London (BBC Voices), Bruges (Concertgebouw), Cortona, Italy (Tuscan Sun Festival), the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels, London and Santiago de Compostela, Spain. She trained at Southern Methodist University where she received two bachelor's degrees in Music and Foreign Languages, and at San Francisco Opera Center where she was an Adler Fellow from 1991 to 1994. She won the silver medal at the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow in 1994 and the operetta prize at the Belvedere Competition in Vienna in 1992.

Baritone and HGO Studio alumnus **Liam Bonner** (Demetrius) was last seen at HGO in the role of Claudio in Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict* (2008). Other operatic roles include Il Cavaliere di Belfiore in Verdi's *Un giorno di Regno* and Papageno in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* at Wolf Trap, the Count in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* at Berkshire Opera, and Sid in Britten's *Albert Herring* at Aspen Opera Theatre. Mr. Bonner continues to maintain a strong relationship with Houston Grand Opera where he has sung the Count in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, Redburn in Britten's *Billy Budd*, the baritone soloist in Theofanidis' *The Refuge*, Silvano in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*, Hortensius in Donizetti's *La fille du régiment*, the Witch in Basil Twist's production of Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*, and both Morales and Dancaïro in Bizet's *Carmen*. He has appeared with the Houston Ballet as soloist in Stravinsky's *Les Noces* and in Orff's *Carmina Burana* at his

alma mater, Carnegie Mellon University. He has also joined the Pittsburgh Symphony for highlights from Mozart's operas and the Filharmonie Hradec Králové in the Czech Republic for a concert of opera favorites. In 2009, he will make his European operatic debut as Guglielmo in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* at English National Opera and joins the roster of the Metropolitan Opera for its production of Dvorak's *Rusalka*. He earned his Master of Music from Manhattan School of Music. Mr. Bonner is a former participant in San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Program and a former Studio and Apprentice Artist at Central City Opera. He is the recipient of the Richard F. Gold Career Grant from The Shoshanna Foundation, a national semi-finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and an award winner from the George London Foundation and Houston Grand Opera's Eleanor McCollum Competition.

An alumnus of the Houston Grand Opera Studio, American tenor **Norman Reinhardt** (Lysander) was last seen as Benedict in HGO's production of Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict* (2008). 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 *The Marriage of Figaro* (2006). He has sung the roles of Brighella in Richard Strauss's *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. 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 in 2003.

**Marie Lenormand** (Herma) is an alumna HGO Studio, where she has performed in the role of Mercédès in Bizet's *Carmen* (2000), Thelma Predmore in the world premiere of Carlisle Floyd's *Cold Sassy Tree* (2000), the title role of Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (2001), and Tebaldo in Verdi's *Don Carlo* (2001). Ms. Lenormand has sung Rosina in Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* with Dallas Opera and Opera de Bordeaux, Penelope in Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* with Chicago Opera Theater, Dorabella in Mozart's *Così Fan Tutte* in Stuttgart, Nicklausse in Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* with New Orleans Opera, Cherubino in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* at Opera Pacific, and Zerlina in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at La Cité de la Musique in Paris. At Glimmerglass Opera, she sang Melanto in *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*, performed in the world premiere (and PBS telecast) of *Central Park*, and Aloës in Chabrier's *L'Etoile*. She has appeared numerous times in broadcasts of NPR's *World of Opera*. She was a Regional Finalist at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the recipient of several awards, including the Bloomberg Greenwood Prize, the Faustina Hurlbutt Prize, and the prestigious Lavoisier Scholarship from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Soprano **Katie van Kooten** makes her Houston Grand Opera debut with the role of Helena in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. A former member of the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, she made her debut as Magda in Puccini's *La Rondine*. For Covent Garden she has also sung Pamina in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, Mimì in Puccini's *La Bohème* and Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust*. Other roles of note include Aminta in Mozart's *Il Re Pastore* for the Linbury Theater and the Mozart Requiem in recital with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. She has recently made her Japanese debut singing Micaela in Bizet's *Carmen* under the direction of Ozawa. A graduate of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, Katie Van Kooten studies voice with Rudolf Piernay. She received her Bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance from Biola University, California where she studied with Dr. Jeanne Robison and graduated from the Torrey Honors Institute, of which she is a perpetual member.

British bass **Matthew Rose** (Bottom) makes his HGO debut in this role. While a student at the Curtis Institute of Music, he performed with the Opera Company of Philadelphia and for the Opera Festival of New Jersey. As part of the Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme in Aldeburgh, he studied with such artists as Sir Thomas Allen, Ann Murray, John Shirley Quirk, Gerald Finley, Sergei Leiferkus, Malcolm Martineau and Roger Vignoles. As a member of the Young Artist Program at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, he performed the roles of Sciarrone in Puccini's *Tosca*, Wagner in Gounod's *Faust*, Collatinus in Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, Steward in Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, Jonas Fogg in Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*, Schlemil in Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, Judge in Philip Glass's *Orphée* and Montano in Verdi's *Otello*. He has since returned to Covent Garden to sing Tom in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*, Zuniga in Bizet's *Carmen*, and Masetto in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Other performances of note include the Monk in Verdi's *Don Carlos* and Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* for Welsh National Opera, and his acclaimed debut at the Glyndebourne Festival as Bottom in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (recipient of the John Christie Award). He appears regularly at the Edinburgh International Festival and he recently made his debut at the BBC Proms in Haydn's *Heiligmesse* under Nosedá. Other concert appearances include Verdi's *Requiem* with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Mozart's *Requiem* and Strauss songs with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Belohlávek; Telemann's *St Matthew Passion* and Haydn's *Creation* at Aldeburgh; Don Fernando in Beethoven's *Fidelio* with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Dvořák's *Te Deum* and *The Dream of Gerontius* with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

British tenor **Peter Wedd** makes his HGO debut in the role of Flute. He studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with William McAlpine and subsequently at the National Opera Studio. He was a Company Principal at the Royal

Opera, Covent Garden from 1999 to 2001 and is a regular guest artist for Welsh National Opera. At WNO his roles have included Don José in Bizet's *Carmen*, Tamino in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, Don Ottavio in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Alfredo in Verdi's *La traviata* and Steuerman in Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*. Other appearances in the UK and Ireland have included performances for Opera Holland Park, the Wexford Festival, the Aldeburgh Festival, London's Royal Albert Hall, Glyndebourne On Tour, English National Opera, Garsington Opera and most recently Opera North. Outside the UK Peter Wedd has sung for the Nationale Reisopera, European Chamber Opera, Singapore Lyric Theatre and recently made his debuts for Opera Australia and Limoges Opera. As a concert artist he has performed with the London Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, Royal Scottish National, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, City of London Sinfonia, Northern Sinfonia, Bournemouth Symphony and The King's Consort and recently had a great success in a performance of excerpts from Adès's *The Tempest* with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Markus Stenz. Peter Wedd has appeared at the Covent Garden and Edinburgh Festivals and abroad at the Maribor Festival in Slovenia and the Cernier Festival in Switzerland.

**Jon Michael Hill** (Puck) makes his HGO debut with this role. He received his BFA in Acting from the University of Illinois in Champaign. He is an ensemble member of the Steppenwolf Theater Company in Chicago where his credits include: Etienne in Bruce Norris's *The Unmentionables*, Franco Wicks in Lett's *Superior Donuts*, and Crow in Frank Galati's *Kafka on the Shore*. Other theater credits include Puck in Chicago Shakespeare in the Park's production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Elegba in Lizzie Loveridge's *In the Red and Brown Water* at the Alliance Theater and the chorus in Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* at Seattle Repertory Theater. Jon was also a day-player on "The Guiding Light" (Bruce, 2 episodes).

HGO Music Director **Patrick Summers** (Conductor) is best known for his formidable grasp of diverse repertoire. Last season, he conducted the world premiere of HGO's new commission by Christopher Theofanidis, *The Refuge* (CD released by Albany, 2008) and last fall's production of Verdi's *A Masked Ball* and the world premiere of Jake Heggie's *Three Decembers: Last Acts*. Last Spring he conducted Puccini's *La bohème* and Britten's *Billy Budd*. Summers made his acclaimed HGO debut in 1998, conducting Verdi's *La traviata* with Patricia Racette. Since then he has led more than thirty-five operas at HGO, among them several world premieres, including Tod Machover's *Resurrection* in 1999 (CD released by Albany, 2002), Carlisle Floyd's *Cold Sassy Tree* in 2000 (Albany, 2005), Jake Heggie's *The End of the Affair* and Rachel Portman's *The Little Prince*. At HGO he conducted Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*. He returned to the Metropolitan Opera for Bellini's *I puritani* and to the San Francisco Opera for Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* and Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* at HGO; led performances of Handel's *Rodelinda* at the Metropolitan Opera followed by a Met tour of Japan conducting Verdi's *La traviata*; reunited with Renée Fleming for several concerts; and returned to Opera Australia for Puccini's *Turandot*. Summers assisted in the creation of André Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and shared conducting duties with the composer during the opera's 1998 world premiere in San Francisco. He also led European premiere of *A Streetcar Named Desire* for the Opéra National du Rhin (Strasbourg). He made his UK debut conducting the Welsh National Opera's *Rigoletto*, which toured Wales and England; he also led the European premiere of Carlisle Floyd's *Of Mice and Men* at the Bregenz Festival with the Vienna Symphony, for which he received international critical acclaim. That production was subsequently mounted in Houston and recorded (Albany, 2004). Summers conducted the 2002 Grammy Award-winning recording *Bel Canto* featuring Renée Fleming and the Orchestra of St. Luke's.

**Richard Bado** celebrates his twentieth 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, has studied advanced choral conducting with 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 fifteen seasons.

Native Texan **Karen Reeves** has prepared the Houston Grand Opera Children's Chorus or child soloists since 1991. Operas she has prepared for HGO featuring a children's chorus without a complementary adult chorus are Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1993), Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* (1997, 2006, 2007) and the world premiere of Rachel Portman's *The Little Prince* (2003, 2004). She was a member of the Houston Grand Opera Chorus for thirteen seasons.

Australian director **Neil Armfield** is currently artistic director of the renowned Company B, at Belvoir Street Theatre, in Sydney. In 1979, he became co-artistic director at Nimrod Theater where he premiered many Australian plays. In 1982 he

joined Jim Sharman's Lighthouse Theatre Company in South Australia and has gone on to direct for all of Australia's state theatre companies, Opera Australia, the Welsh National Opera, the Bregenz Festival in Austria, Zurich Opera, Canadian Opera, English National Opera, and Lyric Theatre in Chicago and Royal Opera House, London. Neil is the recipient of two doctorates of letters, and the Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Performing Arts, the Sydney Theatre Critics' Circle Award for significant contribution to the theater, and was awarded the Officer of the Order of Australia for service to the arts, nationally and internationally, as a director of theatre, opera and film. He has also won many Green Room Awards for best director and Sydney Critics' Circle Awards for best director and in 1991 received a three year Australian Artists' Creative Fellowship. He has received six Helpmann Awards for best director/best work and several international awards including best production at Dublin International Festival of the Arts for *Cloudstreet*. Mr. Armfield's production of *Billy Budd* was co-winner of the 1998 Barclay's Award in London and won a record six Dora Mavor Awards including Best Production and Outstanding Direction of a Musical in Canada in 2001.

### Performance Summary

All performances of Houston Grand Opera's production of Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are held in the Wortham Center's Brown Theater, Texas Avenue at Smith Street, Houston, TX. Sung in English with English supertitles.

### Performance Dates

Friday, January 23, 2009 at 7:30 p.m. \*  
Sunday, January 25, 2009 at 2:00 p.m.  
Saturday, January 31, 2009 at 7:30 p.m.  
Wednesday, February 04, 2009 at 7:30 p.m.  
Friday, February 6, 2009 at 7:30 p.m.

\*ON for Young Professionals reception

### Ticket Information:

- Individual tickets for Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are now on sale and start at \$20 (inclusive of all city surcharges)
- General information and tickets are available at [www.houstongrandopera.org](http://www.houstongrandopera.org) or call **713-228-OPERA** (6737) or **1-800-62-OPERA** (800-626-7372) 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Monday–Friday, and from 12:00 p.m. until curtain time on days of Saturday and Sunday performances. Hours are subject to change.
- 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 talks, 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 swiftly grown from a small regional organization into an internationally renowned opera company. The company has a reputation for commissioning and producing new works, including 39 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, 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 and on the WFMT Radio Network, the European Broadcasting Union, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

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