

HoustonGrandOpera



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## HOUSTON GRAND OPERA PRESENTS THE WORLD PREMIERE OF ANDRÉ PREVIN'S *BRIEF ENCOUNTER*

HOUSTON—Houston Grand Opera closes the 2008–09 season with its 39<sup>th</sup> world premiere, **André Previn**'s *Brief Encounter*, at the Wortham Theater Center's Brown Theater, May 1 – May 8, 2009.

*Brief Encounter* is German-born American pianist, conductor and composer André Previn's second opera. His first opera, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which won the Grand Prix du Disques recording award, had its premiere in San Francisco in 1998 to much acclaim and continues to be performed internationally. The winner of four Academy Awards (Best original musical score: *Gigi*, *Porgy and Bess*, *Irma la douce* and *My Fair Lady*) and ten Grammy Awards, Mr. Previn has also received Lifetime Achievement Awards from *Gramophone Magazine*, the London Symphony Orchestra and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. "André Previn is one of the great iconic musical figures of our time" says HGO General Director and CEO **Anthony Freud**. "He has transcended any genre of music that he has chosen to compose in; thus the opportunity to commission an opera from him is irresistibly exciting."

*Brief Encounter* is an opera in two acts, based on the play *Still Life* and the screen play to the 1945 David Lean film *Brief Encounter*, both by Noël Coward. "It's the film itself—a tale of doomed love—which I thought was so perfect and so beautifully written, directed and acted that it had to be an opera," states Previn. **John Caird**, who holds two Tony Awards for his direction of *Les Misérables* and *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, is both the librettist and director for *Brief Encounter*. "Noël Coward, as a writer, had a deeply empathetic understanding of relationships," explains Caird. "In *Brief Encounter*, he has written a story of what it is like to fall in love in a completely unexpected way, out of the blue, not expecting it to happen and that makes the source very suitable for operatic adaptation."

An honest and compassionate look at emotional infidelity, *Brief Encounter* stars soprano **Elizabeth Futral** and baritone **Nathan Gunn** as Laura and Alec, the couple torn between love and loyalty. Veteran baritone **Kim Josephson** sings the role of Laura's bewildered husband. HGO Music Director **Patrick Summers** conducts. **Bunny Christie** is the set and costume designer and **Paul Pyant** is the lighting designer.

*Brief Encounter* will be performed in English with English supertitles.

Laura Jesson.....	<b>Elizabeth Futral</b> , soprano
Alec Harvey.....	<b>Nathan Gunn</b> , baritone
Fred Jesson.....	<b>Kim Josephson</b> , bass baritone
Dolly Messiter.....	<b>Rebekah Camm</b> , soprano
Myrtle Bagot.....	<b>Meredith Arwady</b> , contralto*
Albert Godby.....	<b>Robert Orth</b> , baritone
Dr. Graves.....	<b>James J. Kee</b> , baritone
Mary Norton.....	<b>Jamie Barton</b> , mezzo
Beryl.....	<b>Alicia Gianni</b> , soprano
Mrs. Rolandson.....	<b>Faith Sherman</b> , mezzo
Stanley.....	<b>Adam Cioffari</b> , bass

Conductor.....	<b>Patrick Summers</b>
Director.....	<b>John Caird</b> *
Set and Costume Designer.....	<b>Bunny Christie</b> *
Lighting Designer.....	<b>Paul Pyant</b>

**Houston Grand Opera Orchestra**

\* Houston Grand Opera debut

## **Related Events:**

### **The Films of André Previn**

*March 29, 2009*

*The Fortune Cookie* - The first pairing of Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau occurs in this Billy Wilder comedy about a man who convinces his brother-in-law to fake an injury in order to win a lawsuit. André Previn composed the score to the Oscar-winning film (Matthau for Best Supporting Actor), and, like director Wilder, escaped persecution from Germany with his family as a young boy.

Please call 713-639-7300 for more information.

### **Sunday Jazz Series at Discovery Green**

*March 29, 2009*

*Discovery Green Park at 3:00 p.m.*

HGO Studio Artists sing music of André Previn at the Sunday Jazz Series at Discovery Green  
713-228-6737 for more information

## **Houston Grand Opera Movie in the Park (Discovery Green)**

March 28, 2009

Discovery Green Park

As part of its salute to André Previn, HGO screens *Gigi* (1958), a film that takes place in a park – shown in a park. André Previn served as Music Director for this Oscar and Grammy award-winning film.

## **Taste This!**

March 31, 2009

The Tasting Room in Uptown Park at 6:00 p.m.

HGO Studio Artists sing music from Academy Award winning movies associated with André Previn's arranging and conducting. Movies featured include *My Fair Lady*, *Porgy and Bess*, and *Gigi*. \$20 cover includes hors d'oeuvres. Doors open at 6 p.m. and seating is limited and on a first come first served basis. Reservations are available by calling the Tasting Room Events Line at 713-622-4477.

## **About the opera:**

Brief Encounter is based on the play *Still Life* and the screenplay to the 1945 film *Brief Encounter*, both by Noël Coward. The André Previn opera was commissioned by Houston Grand Opera. The commission is supported by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. The production of *Brief Encounter* received funding from OPERA America's Opera Fund.

## **The Story:**

In 1930s England, Laura Jesson takes the train to a nearby town once a week for shopping and a movie. By chance she meets Alec Harvey—who, like Laura, is married with two children—and over the course of their weekly town visits, the two fall in love. They continue to meet surreptitiously until they must finally decide between their growing passion for one another and fidelity to their marriages.

## **About the artists:**

Soprano **Elizabeth Futral** (Laura Jesson) was last heard at Houston Grand Opera in the title role of Massenet's *Manon* (2003). Other roles at HGO have included Curley's Wife in Carlisle Floyd's *Of Mice and Men* (2002) and Konstanze in Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* (2002). Other roles of note include Violetta in Verdi's *La traviata* at Washington National Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Deutsch Oper Berlin, Hamburg Staatsoper, and Lyric Opera of Chicago (a role which she will sing at San Francisco Opera this summer); Adina in Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love* at Washington National Opera; Sophie in Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, and the title role in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the Metropolitan Opera. Ms. Futral originated the role of Princess Yue-Yang in the world premiere of Tan Dun's opera *The First Emperor* at the Metropolitan Opera. Her extensive discography includes Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and Ravel's *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* conducted by Maestro Previn (Deutsche Grammophon), *Lucia di Lammermoor* and a solo aria recital (Chandos). Elizabeth Futral can be seen as Stella in the video of *A Streetcar Named Desire* on the Kultur label.

Baritone **Kim Josephson** (Fred Jesson) was last seen at HGO in Strauss's *Salome* (1977). He performs regularly at the Metropolitan Opera where, since 1991, he has performed more than 240 performances of 28 roles including the title role in *Rigoletto*, Germont in *La traviata*, Enrico in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and Belcore in *L'elisir d'amore*. He has also appeared at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, most notably as Eddie Carbone in the world premiere of William Bolcom's *A View from the Bridge* (a role he has also sung for Washington National Opera and the Metropolitan Opera and available on CD from New World Records), Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly*, and Marcello in *La bohème*. He has also appeared with the Seattle Opera, Baltimore Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Fort Worth Opera, the Spoleto Festival, U.S.A., Vancouver Opera, and Vienna State Opera. He has appeared on television in four broadcasts from the Metropolitan Opera, all available on video recording: *La fanciulla del West*, *Arabella*, *Carmen*, and *Billy Budd*. Next season, he will create the role of Billy Harris in Stephen Schwartz's new opera, *Seance on a Wet Afternoon* at Opera Santa Barbara. Kim Josephson is a *Magna Cum Laude* graduate of the University of Houston where he earned B.M. and M.M. in applied voice. He is the recipient of many honors, including William Sullivan/George London Foundation Award, Loren Zachary Foundation Award, Puccini Foundation Award, and a Richard Tucker Career Grant.

Baritone **Nathan Gunn** (Alec Harvey) was last seen at HGO in the role of Ottone in Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppea* (2006). Mr. Gunn has performed at the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Seattle Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Paris Opera, Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich Opera Festival, Glyndebourne Festival, and la Monnaie in Brussels. His many roles include the title roles in *Billy Budd* and *Hamlet*, Figaro in *The Barber of Seville*, Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*, the Count in *Le nozze di Figaro*, and Ottone in *The Coronation of Poppea*. He created the role of Clyde Griffiths in the world premiere of Tobias Picker's new opera, *An American Tragedy* at the Metropolitan Opera, and more recently the role of Father Delaura in Peter Eötvös' *Love and Other Demons* at the Glyndebourne Festival. Also a distinguished concert performer, Mr. Gunn has appeared with the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, London Symphony Orchestra, Münchner Rundfunkorchester, and the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra. Mr. Gunn's recordings include *Just Before Sunrise* (Sony/BMG), *Peter Grimes* with Sir Colin Davis and London Symphony Orchestra (LSO Live!) which was nominated for a 2005 Grammy Award; *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (SONY Classics) and his debut album, a collection of American songs entitled *American Anthem* (EMI). Mr. Gunn was the recipient of the first annual Beverly Sills Artist Award. He is an alumnus of the Metropolitan Opera Lindemann Young Artists Program, and was the winner of the 1994 Metropolitan Opera National Council Competition.

**André Previn** makes his Houston Grand Opera debut with his second opera *Brief Encounter*. His first opera, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, had its premiere at San Francisco Opera and was awarded the *Grand Prix du Disque*. His orchestral and chamber works have been and recorded by the Vienna Philharmonic (*Diversions*) and Renée Fleming (*The Giraffes Go To Hamburg* and *Three Songs of Emily Dickinson*). His *Tango, Song, and Dance* for violin and piano is available on CD from Deutsche Grammophon. Other recent works include the violin concerto *Anne-Sophie*, his double concerto for violin and double bass for Anne-Sophie Mutter and Roman Patkoló, and *Owls*, which had its premiere under his direction—all performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. In March 2008, the Pittsburgh Symphony premiered Mr. Previn's harp concerto under his direction: the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra will give the piece's European premiere this year. This spring Carnegie Hall celebrates his 80th birthday with four concerts of his music, including performances by Renée Fleming, Anne Sophie Mutter, and the Orchestra of St. Luke's. Previn received the International Glenn Gould Prize in 2005 for his wide-achievements as pianist, composer, and conductor. He holds both the Austrian and German Cross of Merit, and was named a Knight of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II in 1996. André Previn holds lifetime achievement awards from the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the London Symphony Orchestra, and received the *Gramophone* Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008.

**Patrick Summers** (Conductor) became HGO's music director in 1998 and is credited with helping the HGO Orchestra become a world-class ensemble, regularly praised by visiting music critics from around the world. In August, he was named one of "The 25 Most Powerful Names in U.S. Opera" by Opera News. As music director, Maestro Summers has conducted 32 operas at HGO, including the world premieres of Tod Machover's *Resurrection*, Carlisle Floyd's *Cold Sassy Tree*, Rachel Portman's *The Little Prince*, Jake Heggie's *The End of the Affair* and *Last Acts (Three Decembers)*, and Christopher Theofanidis's *The Refuge*. He is featured on the company's CD recordings of *Resurrection*, *The Refuge*, *Cold Sassy Tree*, Carlisle Floyd's *Of Mice and Men*, Jake Heggie's *Three Decembers*, Mark Adamo's *Little Women* (also televised nationally on WNET/PBS' Great Performances), and Daniel Catán's *Florenxia en el Amazonas*. An established favorite among the world's leading opera singers, he has led significant role debuts for Renée Fleming (Verdi's *La Traviata*), Susan Graham (Lehár's *The Merry Widow*), Marcello Giordani (Verdi's *Il Trovatore*), Patricia Racette (Verdi's *Don Carlo*), and Dmitri Hvorostovsky (Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*). This season at HGO, he conducts Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Chorus!*, Verdi's *Rigoletto*, and the world premiere of André Previn's *Brief Encounter*. Maestro Summers is in great demand across the continent and abroad as well. His recent Metropolitan Opera credits include portions of the 2008 Opening Night Gala, Strauss's *Salome*, Handel's *Rodelinda*, Verdi's *La Traviata* on tour to Japan, portions of the 2008 Opening Night Gala, and portions of the Met's farewell gala for Joseph Volpe, which was televised nationally on PBS. He led the Orchestra of St. Luke's and Renée Fleming in her Grammy® Award-winning *Bel Canto* (Decca Records) and the world premiere recording of Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*. His North American credits include Seattle Opera, Dallas Opera, San Francisco Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Los Angeles Philharmonic, National Symphony, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and the National Arts Centre Orchestra (Ottawa), and his international credits include the Bregenz Festival (Austria), Oslo Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony, Welsh National Opera, Opera Australia, Opera de Bordeaux, and Teatro San Carlos (Lisbon). He also led the 1997 European concert tour of the English Chamber Orchestra, featuring Olga Borodina and Dmitri Hvorostovsky, in performances at Berlin's Deutsche Oper, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, London's Royal Festival Hall, and Paris' Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. He conducted the first-ever *Tosca* produced in China and has conducted, coached, and taught at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and throughout Japan. Maestro Summers was recently named San Francisco Opera's Principal Guest Conductor.

**John Caird** (Director and Librettist) is a freelance director and writer working in theater, musical theater, and opera. Many of his recent productions have been for the Royal National Theatre in London. He is an Honorary Associate Director of the

Royal Shakespeare Company, where he has directed over twenty plays. Television work includes *Nicholas Nickleby*, *As You Like It* and his own adaptation of Shakespeare's Henry IV plays for the BBC. His published work as a writer, adapter and lyricist includes a new version of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* with the composer Ilona Sekacz, first performed at the RSC, a new adaptation of J.M.Barrie's *Peter Pan* with Trevor Nunn, which played at the RSC and the National, *Children of Eden* with composer Stephen Schwartz, *Jane Eyre* and *Daddy Long Legs*, both with composer Paul Gordon, and Bernstein's *Candide* with new lyrics by Richard Wilbur and Stephen Sondheim.

British designer **Bunny Christie** (Set and Costume Designer) makes her HGO debut with the designs for *Brief Encounter*. She has worked extensively world-wide in Theatre, Opera and Television. Ms. Christie has won many awards including the 2003 Laurence Olivier Theatre Award for Best Set Designer 2002 for *A Streetcar Named Desire* performed at the Royal National Theatre and the 2000 London Evening Standard Theatre Award for Best Stage Designer for *Baby Doll* performed at the Royal National Theatre. Her design credits include the Royal National Theatre (*Mrs Affleck*, *Women of Troy*, *The Philistines*, *The Lives of Galileo*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Baby Doll*, *War & Peace*), The Donmar Warehouse (*Family Reunion* and *After Miss Julie*) and *As You Like It* for Shakespeare's Globe. Ms. Christie's opera designs have been seen at Chichester Festival Theatre (*Carmen*) and Opera 80 (*Marriage of Figaro*, *Così Fan Tutti* and *Lucia Di Lamermoor*).

## **Performance Summary**

All performances of Houston Grand Opera's production of André Previn's *Brief Encounter* 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, May 1, 2009 at 7:30 p.m.  
Sunday, May 3, 2009 at 2:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, May 5, 2009 at 7:30 p.m.  
Thursday, May 7, 2009 at 7:30 p.m.  
Saturday, May 9, 2009 at 7:30 p.m.

## **Ticket Information:**

- Individual tickets for André Previn's *Brief Encounter* are now on sale and start at \$20 (inclusive of all city surcharges)
- General information and tickets are available at [www.houstopera.org](http://www.houstopera.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 the theater, 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 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 38 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 on the WFMT Radio Network, as well as internationally via the European Broadcasting Union, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

*Brief Encounter* was commissioned by Houston Grand Opera. The commission is supported by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. The production of *Brief Encounter* received funding from OPERA America's *Opera Fund*.

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