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60<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
SEASON  
2014-15

**PRESS RELEASE**

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## Houston Grand Opera Follows Sold-Out Winter Season with Next Installment of Epic Wagner Cycle and Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*

Houston, March 11, 2015—Houston Grand Opera (HGO) will present its highly anticipated La Fura dels Baus staging of Wagner's *Die Walküre* with an all-star cast and Stephen Sondheim's thrilling *Sweeney Todd* in April, after notching critical and sales successes with its winter productions of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* and Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. *Butterfly*'s six performances averaged a total capacity of 102% (including resale of returned seats) while *Flute*'s five performances averaged 104% capacity.

The *Houston Chronicle* praised the "richness, passion, and style [soprano Ana Maria] Martinez lavished on Puccini's music," and observed that "the rest of the production largely equaled Martinez's musical and dramatic force. Tenor Alexey Dolgov sang with a ring, freshness, and fire...Baritone Scott Hendricks's Sharpless had a sonorous voice and humane demeanor." The *Chronicle* also noted the "warmth and weight" of Sofia Selowsky's voice as Suzuki, and the "transparency, sweetness, and poetry" of the Houston Grand Opera Orchestra under the direction of Giancarlo Guerrero.

*Houstonia* Magazine lauded the "exceptional singing" of HGO's *Magic Flute*, particularly the "stunning" HGO debut of tenor David Portillo as Tamino, the "robustness" of soprano Nicole Heaston as Pamina, and soprano Kathryn Lewek's "first-rate HGO debut in a role that has become her signature. Also notable was bass-baritone Michael Sumuel as the jester Papageno and, as Sarastro, bass Morris Robinson, who has a voice that sounds larger than life."

### ***Die Walküre*: all-star cast headlines second installment of HGO's first *Ring* cycle in American premiere of hit production, April 18–May 3, 2015**

Marking an important company milestone, last season HGO launched its first presentation of Wagner's glorious *Ring* cycle with *Das Rheingold*, in an "enthraling" (*Opera News*) production from **La Fura dels Baus**,

the genre-defying Catalan theater company behind Barcelona's 1992 Olympic opening ceremony. Never previously staged in America, director **Carlus Padrissa's** innovative conception combines cutting-edge visuals with acrobats in tableaux of human scenery. When released on DVD, the production won an ECHO Klassik Award and scored a five-star review in *BBC Music* magazine, which called it "the most exciting staging I've seen." (Highlights may be seen [here](#).)

In HGO's second installment of the epic cycle, *Die Walküre*, Scottish bass-baritone **Iain Paterson** continues his first staged portrayal of Wotan, in which he "captured the grandeur of Wotan's proudest moments" (*Houston Chronicle*). He will be joined by **Christine Goerke**, giving her hotly anticipated first staged performances in the U.S. as Brünnhilde. Of her performance at the Canadian Opera Company earlier this season, the *New York Times* wrote, "Her gleaming tones sliced through" the orchestra, and "leapt effortlessly to the high B's and C's....Every phrase in Ms. Goerke's performance of this daunting role was driven by what her character was saying." **Simon O'Neill**—"the best heroic tenor to emerge over the last decade" (*Telegraph*) and HGO's 2014–15 Lynn Wyatt Great Artist—reprises the role of Siegmund after his tour de force at HGO last fall in the title role of Verdi's *Otello*. Revered Finnish soprano **Karita Mattila** returns to Houston after her recent triumph in HGO's *Fidelio* for a role debut as his twin, Sieglinde. Her many honors include winning the inaugural Cardiff Singer of the World competition, one of opera's most influential awards. American mezzo and HGO Studio alumna **Jamie Barton**, who resumes her rendering of Fricka, was the 2013 Cardiff winner.

As in the first leg of HGO's *Ring* journey, Artistic and Music Director **Patrick Summers**, who achieved "exceptionally rich orchestral color" (*Opera News*), will lead from the pit.

### ***Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street: Sondheim's macabre masterpiece returns to HGO—the first opera house to mount it—in the American premiere of new staging, April 24–May 9, 2015***

Described by the *New York Times* as "the greatest and perhaps best-known artist in the American musical theater," **Stephen Sondheim** is the winner of a Pulitzer Prize, the Laurence Olivier Award, an Academy Award, a Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement, seven further Tonys, and multiple Grammy Awards. Ever committed to musical theater, America's homegrown contribution to the operatic genre, HGO was the first opera company to mount Sondheim's musical thriller, *Sweeney Todd*, after its opening run on Broadway, and the upcoming production marks the American premiere of a new staging by **Lee Blakeley**. When it premiered in Paris, the *Wall Street Journal* punningly pronounced the black comedy "a cut above...[in] Lee Blakeley's brilliant production."

It was Grammy Award-winning baritone **Nathan Gunn**, now making his title role debut as HGO's demon barber, who helped create "the evening's single most beautiful performance" (*New York Times*) at the New York Philharmonic's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday gala celebrations for Sondheim. Dramatic soprano **Susan Bullock**, who made waves with her star turn at London's Last Night of the Proms in 2011, makes her first foray into musical theater in her role debut as Todd's partner in crime, Mrs. Lovett. And HGO Studio alumnus **Nicholas Phan**, dubbed "an artist who must be heard" (NPR), sings his first Tobias Ragg.

**James Lowe**, an HGO Studio alum who scored a Grammy nomination for his leadership of the Tony Award-winning Broadway revival of *Anything Goes*, will conduct.

HGO's commitment to musical theater drew praise in the 2012-13 season when the company staged what the *Houston Chronicle* described as "a stunning and gorgeous new production of Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II's 1929 groundbreaking *Show Boat*"; the review went on to "commend Maestro Patrick Summers and his brave decision to work more Broadway shows into HGO's season.

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## About Houston Grand Opera

Since its inception in 1955, Houston Grand Opera has grown from a small regional organization into an internationally renowned opera company. HGO enjoys a reputation for commissioning and producing new works, including 55 world premieres and seven 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 and innovative program of performances, community events, and education projects that reaches the widest possible public. HGO has toured extensively, including trips to Europe and Asia, and has won a Tony, two Grammy awards, and two Emmy awards—the only opera company to have won all three honors.

Through HGOco, Houston Grand Opera creates opportunities for Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to observe, participate in, and create art. HGOco's *Song of Houston* project is an ongoing initiative to create and share work based on stories that define the unique character of our city and its diverse cultures. Since 2007, HGOco has commissioned 16 new works along with countless innovative community projects, reaching more than one million people in the greater Houston metropolitan area. The NEXUS Initiative is HGO's multi-year ticket underwriting program that allows Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to enjoy world-class opera without the barrier of price. Since 2007 NEXUS has enabled more than 175,000 Houstonians to experience first-quality opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

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## HOUSTON GRAND OPERA

\* HGO debut

+ current or former HGO Studio artist

### 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Concert

**March 19, 2015**

Joyce DiDonato, mezzo-soprano

Conductor: Patrick Summers

HGO Studio artists

HGO Orchestra

### Wagner: *Die Walküre*

**April 18, 22, 25, 30; May 3m, 2015**

Conductor: Patrick Summers

Director: Carlus Padrissa / La Fura dels Baus

Associate Director: Esteban Muñoz

Set Designer: Roland Olbeter

Costume Designer: Chu Uroz  
Lighting Designer: Peter van Praet  
Video Designer: Franc Aleu  
Brünnhilde: Christine Goerke  
Wotan: Iain Paterson  
Sieglinde: Karita Mattila  
Siegmund: Simon O'Neill  
Fricka: Jamie Barton+  
Hunding: Ain Anger

*A co-production of Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia, Valencia, and Maggio Musicale, Florence*

**Stephen Sondheim: Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street**

**April 24, 26m, 29, May 2, 8, 9, 2015**

Conductor: James Lowe+  
Director: Lee Blakeley  
Set and Costume Designer: Tanya McCallin  
Lighting Designer: Rick Fisher  
Choreographer: Lorena Randi\*  
Chorus Master: Richard Bado  
Sweeney Todd: Nathan Gunn  
Mrs. Lovett: Susan Bullock  
Johanna: Megan Samarin+  
Anthony Hope: Morgan Pearse+  
Tobias Ragg: Nicholas Phan+  
Judge Turpin: Jake Gardner  
Beggar Woman: Cynthia Clayton

*Production originally created by Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris*

*Premiered at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris on April 22, 2011*

*Co-owned by Houston Grand Opera, San Francisco Opera, and Théâtre du Châtelet*

***El Pasado Nunca Se Termina/The Past Is Never Finished***

**May 13, 16, 17m, 2015**

Music: José "Pepe" Martínez  
Libretto: Leonard Foglia  
with Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán

*A co-production with Lyric Opera of Chicago*

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