What will you remember from the 2012–13 season?
The spectacle and fun of Show Boat? The power of Tristan and Isolde? Perhaps an Opera to Go! performance with your children?

Here’s something else you ought to remember: the past season was the continuation of an important journey for HGO. Thanks to our wonderful donors, HGO is growing steadily.

Houston is the fastest-growing large city in the country. In the last thirty years, the population of our region has nearly doubled, from three million to six million people.

HGO must grow as well. For over a decade, our annual budget was static: approximately $20 million. We did exceptional work within that budget. But if we are to serve our city’s expanding population, our budget must grow as well.

Thanks to the generosity of donors like you, we’re increasing our activities. We presented forty-seven performances in 2012–13, up from thirty-six the previous season.

We staged more performances for two reasons. First, we want to keep pace with Houston’s growing population. Second, we know that demand for our work warranted expansion.

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The results bear this out. The total audience for our main stage season was 71,823—a 12 percent increase over the previous season.

Subscription sales alone were up by nearly 7 percent. We not only sold more tickets, but also attracted more loyal customers.

We asked one of our new subscribers, Reuel Sosa, why he joined HGO this season.

“In my childhood I became fascinated with opera. However, I lived in Belize, which did not readily have facilities to promote the performing arts,” he responded. “When I relocated to Houston, I witnessed the grandeur, enthusiasm, and passion of HGO. Immediately, I knew that HGO was the institution where I would feel at home. HGO is more than an experience; it is an extension of my family. It is my deepest desire to continue to see HGO reach new heights, and then surpass them—knowing that I played a role, even if only in a small part, in this noble and magnificent endeavor.”

This increase in the size of our audience is wonderful news. However, ticket sales cover only a quarter of our operating expenses. So, increased ticket sales alone won’t allow us to grow the company.

Contributions aren’t just a nice bonus for HGO. They are absolutely essential to the work we do. The only way to grow our activities is to increase our total contributed revenue.

You have come through for us. In 2012–13, we increased the membership in our Patrons Circle with more than fifty new Patrons for the fifth year in a row. Not only are more people subscribing to HGO, but more and more subscribers are joining us as Patrons.

For example, Wynn and Shawna McCloskey joined the Patrons Circle this year after subscribing to the company since the 2005–06 season. Wynn grew up taking the train from Baltimore to see performances at the Metropolitan Opera with his father. He has now lived in Houston for thirty years, and says he has “developed a great pride in the fact that Houston has its own truly world-class opera company. When I actually sat down to consider becoming a Patron, it was clear that this extra support fit hand in glove with my pride in HGO. My wife and I particularly like having the opportunity to visit regularly with HGO people and other Patrons. We feel so much more like we are a part of HGO.”

HGO inspires great passion and loyalty in members of our family like Reuel, Shawna, and Wynn. That loyalty is the reason for our success. For the first time in over a decade, we’re beginning to increase our operating budget.

We’re growing, and we’re doing it responsibly. Next season, you can look for more operas (eight), more performances (fifty), and more programs in the community.

We couldn’t do it without you. Thank you!

Shawna and Wynn McCloskey, new Patrons
The summer months are a quieter time at HGO—there are no operas in the Wortham Center, no arts programs in public schools.

But Inspiring Performance—The Campaign for Houston Grand Opera never takes a break. So far this summer, HGO has raised over $5.5 million for the campaign, taking us closer to the goal of at least $165 million by the end of 2014.

A highlight of the campaign this summer is a $1 million gift from the Robert and Janice McNair Foundation to support HGO’s new series of holiday-themed operas.

You’ll recognize the name: Robert McNair is the founder, chairman, and CEO of the Houston Texans. McNair served as president of HGO’s board from 1995 to 1997. The McNair Foundation has been an HGO supporter for many years, and this new gift is the largest single commitment the McNairs have ever made to the company.

McNair said of the gift, “We are excited that this holiday opera series can become a new tradition for Houston families and lovers of the arts.” The series, which begins with Iain Bell and Simon Callow’s A Christmas Carol in 2014, is among the overall goals of the campaign, and will establish a permanent presence for HGO in the Wortham Center during the festive season.

The campaign’s success is the story of everyone’s support, at every level. Thousands of loyal donors have contributed to Inspiring Performance—if you have made a gift to HGO in the last six years, you are a part of that success.

Inspiring Performance is attracting new donors as well—more than 440 since last September. This past season has also seen fifty-two new members of HGO’s Patrons Circle.

The McNair Foundation’s gift for this special project is a reminder that there are dozens of exciting HGO programs and projects that need support: main stage operas, community engagement, the HGO Studio, the HGO Orchestra, and the HGO Endowment. There are opportunities for every member of the HGO family to get involved.

Inspiring Performance has been a wonderful success so far. We still have a long way to go to reach our goal, but with your help, we will accomplish the most ambitious fundraising goal a Houston performing arts organization has ever set for itself.
Leave a Proud Legacy for HGO

It’s easier than you think.

A major focus of Inspiring Performance—The Campaign for Houston Grand Opera is to encourage all HGO donors to make a legacy gift through wills or estate plans. All donors can help ensure the future of great opera in Houston.

Perhaps you think this would be a nice thing to do for HGO, but you’re not sure how to go about it. We asked Director of Major Gifts and Legacy Planning Richard Buffett about common concerns and how to overcome them.

“For years, I didn’t have an estate plan,” Richard responded. “Like 60 percent of Americans, I considered it an ‘important but not urgent’ matter that I’d get around to…someday. The reasons I used for not creating my plan are the most common ones I still hear today.

“The first concern is: I don’t have a lawyer, and I don’t know where to find one. If you know of friends who have already created their wills, ask about their experiences. Be sure to find a lawyer certified in estate planning and probate. You may want to consider lawyers in smaller firms or solo practice, since they may offer better rates and even complimentary consultation.

“Another common obstacle: Doing my will seems depressing. However, once people actually start working on a will, it typically brings great peace of mind. It removes uncertainty about how your assets will be divided, and makes sure that the people and causes you care about will be provided for. And if circumstances change, you can always revise your plans.”

Including HGO in your will makes you a partner in perpetuating the art form we love, ensuring its vibrant good health for future generations.

For more information, you can contact Richard at rbuffett@hgo.org or 713-546-0216.

Michelle Beale, chair of the Laureate Society Council, which recognizes donors who have made legacy gifts to HGO.

Make a Gift That Lasts

Friends of HGO can help ensure the company’s future by including HGO in their wills. Contributions made through a will, trust, or life-income arrangement are all forms of legacy giving—and anyone can make a legacy gift at any time.

It can be as easy as naming HGO on the beneficiary form of an IRA, pension account, or charitable trust, but making a bequest in a will is the easiest way to create your legacy. The following is an example of how you might word an outright bequest.

“I give, devise, and bequeath to the Houston Grand Opera Endowment, Inc., with offices located at 510 Preston Street, Houston, TX, 77002-1504, the sum of ____ (state amount or use percentage of) to be used for general endowment purposes.”

Your generous gift will be well cared for. The Houston Grand Opera Endowment, Inc., manages all legacy gifts with professional investment managers and an independent board of trustees overseeing the fund.
One of the most exciting events at HGO each summer is the Create an Opera Camp. Students in grades 3–6 prepare an opera from beginning to end—and perform it—all within one week!

The campers compose the music, write the words, build the set, and come up with props and costumes. They are guided by professionals, of course, but the kids are the engine that makes it all work. This year, the opera was based on the Caldecott Honor book *Blackout* by John Rocco. The story takes place in Houston when the power went out as a result of Hurricane Ike. Chelsea Lerner was the camp director.

Opera Camps are generously supported by Shell Oil Company and JPMorgan Chase Foundation.

From top: Jesús Mánuel Pacheco keeps track of the campers’ ideas as they work on the words of their opera; Steve Kalke (at piano) leads a musical rehearsal; the campers recreated the Houston skyline for their set—and included HGO, of course; the characters are plunged into darkness during the opera; everyone celebrates a successful performance.

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**YAVA Expands**

HGO’s Young Artists Vocal Academy—YAVA—expanded to two sessions this summer, thanks to the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Robert N. Wakefield, the HGO Guild, The Lancaster Hotel, and Mrs. Lynn Guggolz. YAVA was established in 2010 by HGO Studio Director Laura Canning as an addition to the HGO Studio program. Its purpose is to identify the most gifted young singers at the undergraduate level and help them on the path to becoming a young artist with a rigorous, one-week training program.

The intensive sessions help participants with such skills as characterization, preparing a score, diction, and movement. The schedule also includes daily voice lessons, vocal coachings, and dramatic coachings—all vital to aspiring young singers.
“Companies throughout the country are watching what is happening in Houston, aware of the need to engage and build new audiences.” That’s how correspondent Jeffrey Brown of PBS NewsHour summed up a profile of HGO that aired on the program May 22.

The profile focused on HGO’s innovative efforts to expand the definition of opera with works such as *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* and connect with the increasingly diverse communities of Houston. The profile also looked at the changing demographics in Houston, and how they are affecting the artistic climate of our city. In the segment, HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers explains, “We absorb each other’s culture, and what comes out is something uniquely American… That’s how I view Houston. And that’s very much how I view the role of Houston Grand Opera.”

The seven-minute segment includes clips from HGO commissions *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*, *The Refuge*, *Past the Checkpoints*, *New Arrivals*, and *The Memory Stone* and can be viewed on HGO’s home page, hgo.org.

Also in the news, HGO’s spring repertory was widely reviewed, due in part to the performances of renowned Wagnerians Nina Stemme and Ben Heppner in the title roles of *Tristan and Isolde*. The *Wall Street Journal* called *Tristan and Isolde* a “thrilling theatrical event,” and the Associated Press commented, “The Swedish soprano gave a performance of overwhelming vocal and dramatic intensity as the Irish princess, from gleaming top notes down to a potent, crystal-clear lower register.”