From 6 p.m. on October 14 to 6 p.m. on October 15, 2015, show your love for great opera and join us for HGO’s second annual Giving Day.

What is Giving Day?

Giving Day is a special 24-hour fundraising effort with the goal of raising at least $250,000 in a single day. Giving Day lets us showcase our work, reach out to new donors, and give current supporters a new way to give a little more to HGO.

Your gift is a powerful statement that great art matters.

Focused on social media, web, and email, HGO’s Giving Day is a wonderful way for us to attract new online donors. Last year, HGO launched its first-ever Giving Day on December 2, 2014, raising an astounding $235,087. In one single day, we received more online gifts than we typically receive in a whole year!

Our special Giving Day website, AllinforHGO.org, is already up and running. Keep an eye out for special Giving Day emails and posts on Twitter (@HouGrandOpera), Facebook (facebook.com/houstongrandopera), and Instagram.

Most of all, Giving Day is about YOU! All donors are encouraged to respond to HGO after donating by leaving comments, social media posts, or sharing photos or videos of your own HGO story and why you give. Every donor is recognized on the Giving Day website immediately upon contributing.

You’re Kind of a Big Deal

If you’re reading Opera Unleashed, you receive this newsletter because you support HGO. We couldn’t do what we do without you. Thank you! On Giving Day, we encourage annual donors like you to make a special gift in addition to their usual contribution. The point of Giving Day is to ask everyone to go above and beyond, and to do something special for HGO. It can be $50 or $5,000—anything you can share above and beyond your regular donation means the world to us.
Our Giving Day Heroes

On October 14–15, your gift goes even further, due to the generous support of two special people. Longtime HGO family members and our “Giving Day Heroes” John Turner and Jerry Fischer will match any gift, dollar for dollar, up to $100,000 on Giving Day—just as they did last year!

When asked why they chose to generously underwrite Giving Day, John and Jerry said, “Giving Day is a good way to celebrate the artists, creativity, energy—all of the things that make HGO special. It is like HGO’s own little holiday. We believe that matching donations is a great way to encourage new supporters to join the HGO family and current donors to do a little more for a company that goes above and beyond every day.”

Our goal for Giving Day 2015 is to exceed last year’s donations in a big way, and we need your help to get there. Giving Day’s unofficial mascot, Opera Cat, will return to lead the day—in fact, he’s already waiting for you at the Giving Day website, AllinforHGO.org. Who knows who else will be a part of our Giving Day celebration? Last year, artists from Jamie Barton and Joyce DiDonato to Bun B, Robert Earl Keen, and Lyle Lovett showed their support for HGO! Expect special messages, updates, and behind-the-scenes “love notes” throughout Giving Day, as well as special contests and prizes.

Please join us on October 14–15 and help us go “All in for HGO!”

Bill Bartlett: Leaving a Legacy for HGO

Bill Bartlett may be a new Laureate Society member, but he’s been a part of the HGO family since 1959. Bill was a member of our world-famous HGO Chorus from 1959 through 1988, singing in 103 productions as a chorister and even taking on a few roles. For this lyric baritone, when it came time to plan his estate, leaving a gift to HGO in his will was at the top of his list.

“After singing 29 years with the opera, my close association with the organization was the deciding factor in what to do with my estate…it’s one of the things I really wanted to do.”

Legacy giving is essential to our company’s success. For Bill and our other Laureate Society members, the joy of opera is meant to be shared. Through their generous estate plans, our Laureate Society members ensure future generations of Houstonians will enjoy world-class opera.

In addition to his passion for opera, Bill is an orchid enthusiast with more than 1,400 orchids at his home and is an avid world traveler. At our matinee performances, look for Bill in the Wortham’s Masterson Green Room. This life-long operagoer is sure to be talking about the performance with his HGO family.

For more information on legacy giving, please contact Richard Buffett, director of major gifts and legacy planning, at rbuffett@hgo.org or 713-546-0216.
Meet HGO’s Resident Information Source

How does Paul Hopper answer when someone asks him what a dramaturg does?

“When I’m asked what I do as dramaturg, my go-to response, depending on the crowd, is that I’m the resident opera nerd,” Paul says with a laugh.

“As the resident information source for the company, I stand at the point between the artistic department and the rest of the company so that we have a consistent way to speak about our work internally,” he elaborates. “Externally, I’m the point between the audience and the stage. My job is to lessen the distance between them.”

Paul, who trained as an opera singer at the Eastman School of Music (B.M.) and University of Houston (M.M.), joined HGO in 2013 as artistic and rehearsal coordinator. In that position, he began assisting Mena Mark Hanna, the dramaturg at that time, with creating supertitles—an art in and of itself. Paul was able to observe how the position functions within the company, so when Hanna left HGO last year to become the dean of the Barenboim-Said Academy in Berlin, Paul sought the dramaturg position.

“The education I received at Eastman planted the seeds for being a dramaturg,” he says. “Eastman has one of the best music libraries in the United States, and I would spend days just soaking up recordings, looking at scores, learning roles, and learning operas. And I had fantastic performance opportunities at University of Houston.”

His preparation as a performer stood him in good stead for the many public aspects of his job at HGO. He gives the Opera Insights pre-curtain presentations, speaks at Opera Unwrapped gatherings for subscribers, and with HGO’s first-ever Ring cycle in progress, he also has some exciting additional duties.

On November 16 at 6:30 p.m., he will host Ring 301 in the Cullen Theater. Paul calls it a refresher course on the Ring cycle and an introduction to Siegfried.

“By the time you receive this issue of Unleashed, Paul will have almost completed his first year as dramaturg—and he says it’s been everything he hoped. “My favorite moments are when someone comes up to me after a presentation and says, ‘I have seen Die Walküre three times before, and I never got it, but your description made it make sense to me.’ Those are the times when all my behind-the-scenes work pays off. I take a lot of joy in those moments.”
HGO Studio Underwriters: Supporting the Next Generation of Opera Stars

Joyce DiDonato, Ana María Martínez, Eric Owens, and Jamie Barton—these internationally recognized singers’ names are familiar to most operagoers.

Here in Houston, their names have special significance. These opera stars found their first home in our HGO Studio—one of the world’s most prestigious artist-in-training programs.

Behind every HGO Studio artist is a Studio underwriter. Jim and Molly Crownover, members of our HGO family for over 30 years, are longtime Studio underwriters and currently support mezzo-soprano Sofia Selowsky.

Jim, a member of the HGO Board of Directors, and his wife, Molly, say: “These young, hugely talented artists are the future of opera. From Concert of Arias on, we have loved watching them develop and succeed in their careers. It is clear the HGO Studio is a crucial step in their advancement.”

The success of the young artists of the HGO Studio is due to the passion and vision of our Studio underwriters.

For information on supporting an HGO Studio artist, contact Emily Schreiber at 713-546-0276 or eschreiber@hgo.org.

The HGO Studio Showcase—a highly anticipated annual event—received two performances in September in the Cullen Theater. Young artists from the HGO Studio supplied all the talent, both vocal and at the piano, for this evening of staged opera scenes.

Clockwise from top: Yongzhao Yu and Pureum Jo in Carmen; all singers of the HGO Studio in the finale from La rondine; Pureum Jo, Federico De Michelis, and D’Ana Lombard in Radamisto; Sofia Selowsky and Ben Edquist in Pelleas and Melisande. Photos by Lynn Lane.
Opera Is for Kids!

You make the Student Performance Series possible.

What was your first opera? Maybe your mother loved opera and took you to see *Hansel and Gretel* as a child. Or a college advisor signed you up for an Introduction to Opera class and you fell in love with this great art form.

Many Houston-area students are about to experience that same thrill of live performing arts for the very first time. Through HGO’s Student Performance Series, over 6,000 students each year in grades 4–12 from 30 different school districts come to the Wortham Theater Center and experience the transformative magic of live opera. From riding up the majestic Wortham elevators to the anticipation while the orchestra tunes up, to hearing opera singing for the first time, the experience is unforgettable for the kids.

Last year, students who attended our Student Performance Series fell in love with Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*. One student wrote: “Walking through the doors almost froze me in awe. It only got better as the curtains began to rise. Everything on stage was astounding, amazing, and mind-blowing.”

Jose, age 18, said, “This was my first opera and I loved it. I will be coming to many more after this experience!” And from Briana, age 17: “When I walked into the Wortham Theater Center for the first time a feeling washed over me that told me this is a place of happiness and I belong here…I absolutely fell in love with opera thanks to High School Night.”

In 2015, the Student Performance Series includes two student-friendly productions. High School Night will feature Puccini’s *Tosca* on November 5, and grades 4–8 will attend Rachel Portman and Nicholas Wright’s *The Little Prince* on December 8, 9, and 15.

Students see the powerful stories that words and music tell when they come to the Wortham and see live opera, and exposure to the performing arts is a vital part of their education. HGO’s Student Performance Series is possible only through the generous support of our HGO family.

With your help, a whole new generation of Houstonians will experience opera for the first time. We’ll bring the magic of *Tosca* and *The Little Prince* to our youngest HGO family members.

For more information on supporting the Student Performance Series, contact Kelly Finn, director of development, institutional giving, at 713-546-0265 or at kfinn@hgo.org.

We are grateful to the following sponsors who make Student Performances possible.

- ExxonMobil
- Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo
- Wells Fargo
- Schissler Foundation Endowed Fund for Educational Programs
- Lawrence E. Carlton M.D. Endowed Fund in memory of Rubalee Hankamer Ball
- The Brown Foundation, Inc.
- Schlumberger
- The Wortham Foundation, Inc.
- Nabors Industries
- Shell Oil Company
- BBVA Compass
- Anchorage Foundation of Texas
- M.D. Anderson Foundation
- MD Anderson Cancer Center
Ask Rudy!
The wit and wisdom of Rudy Avelar,
HGO Director of Patron Services

Q: Hey Rudy, what are you most looking forward to as you start your 38th season at HGO?

Rudy: Wow. It’s like trying to decide what my favorite ice cream is. I love them all! No. 1—Tosca. My favorite opera! The tenor aria in Act 1, “Recondita armonia,” takes my breath away, it is so beautiful. “Vissi d’arte” breaks your heart, and I am a pushover for anyone jumping off the top of a castle. Also, our new production of Rusalka is fabulous (I remember Renée Fleming singing Rusalka here at the Wortham in 1991). Also, Siegfried is sure to thrill. I have only seen one other production of this Wagner masterpiece. A great line-up this year—I can’t wait for the season to begin!

In the Media

El Pasado Nunca Se Termina

“Many of the songs are achingly beautiful while others unfold with great spirit and verve. All of the musical numbers ably move the plot along on its way to the unforeseen final resolution, which does not occur until the very last moments of the opera. The twists and turns keep the viewer deeply involved in the story; a friend in the audience was moved to tears. ‘This is my family story,’ she said.”

—TheaterJones.com

O Columbia

“Exploration, risk, and loss are elegantly balanced in the opera’s first two sections...The ‘loss’ sections...are piercingly moving. The third section...pushes the optimistic conclusion hard, but the writing remains strong and compelling.”

—The Wall Street Journal


Megan Samarin, Pureum Jo, and Ben Edquist in O Columbia, 2015. Photo by Lynn Lane.