TRUE HEROES

The mythical heroes of Wagner’s *Ring* cycle are pretty impressive—but HGO couldn’t have brought them to our stage without the help of our very own flesh-and-blood heroes.

The spectacular finale of Houston’s historic first-ever *Ring* cycle is coming to the Wortham Theater from April 22 through May 7, and it’s going to be enormous.

*Götterdämmerung* means the “twilight of the gods” and the end of the world—at least as the characters know it. With gods, giants, warriors, and monsters, the final entry in this four-part series sees the return of every stunning element from the first three operas: dramatic special effects, complex characters, doomed romance, war, and redemption.

At five and a half hours long, Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung* is so huge that HGO’s production requires:

- 299 people to run the show, including cast, crew, chorus, orchestra, supers, and stage management. For comparison, our 2016–17 season opener, *The Elixir of Love*, required 126 people.
- 90 musicians in the orchestra—67 in last season’s *Tosca*
- 41.25 hours of orchestra rehearsal—only 18.25 for *Elixir*
- 60 flaming torches and 1.5 gallons of liquid paraffin for each performance
- 12 video screens with 15 projectors
- 269 gallons of water in three suspended tanks weighing, when filled, 2,500 pounds…each!
- Five truckloads of props, costumes, and set pieces—two for *Elixir*.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2
All of this would have been impossible without supporters like you. The total cost of all four *Ring* operas is about $16 million—making this one of the most expensive undertakings in HGO’s history. And as is the case for all of HGO’s productions, ticket sales alone cover less than a quarter of the cost. So even with 41,500 tickets sold to audience members from 17 countries and 45 states, the *Ring* relies on you—our donors.

Several key supporters made leadership contributions that made this multiyear effort one of the greatest accomplishments in HGO’s 62-year history. **John Turner** and **Jerry Fischer**, Premier Guarantors, led the way. We call them Ring Leaders, and to every opera lover who has experienced the awe-inspiring *Ring* cycle at the Wortham Theater Center, they are even greater heroes than Siegfried himself.

“It’s been an incredible journey, and I’m glad to have been a part of it.”

**Robin Angly**
HGO Board Member

She and her husband, Miles Smith, were among the very first of the Ring Leaders, and have been enthusiastic supporters from the beginning. “[Artistic and Music Director] Patrick Summers did such a terrific job of building the orchestra so they would be ready for the *Ring*, and now it has really put HGO on the map.”

“I think our production is lively, energetic, and colorful,” says Ring Leader Rhonda Sweeney. “It is really different, and that makes it attractive even for people who’ve seen it many times.” And Rhonda would know—she and her husband Donald have traveled the world to experience nine *Ring* cycles.

When the curtain falls on *Götterdämmerung* this May, we’ll know that HGO can do anything, emerging from the triumph of the *Ring* as one of the world’s greatest opera companies.

More than anything, this adventure has brought us closer to our family of generous supporters. Thank you!

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LEAVE A PROUD LEGACY FOR HGO
It’s easier than you may think.

Your generosity can make it possible for successive generations to fall in love with opera the way you did. How? By making a legacy gift through your will or estate plan.

Perhaps you think this would be a nice thing to do, 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 excuses I used for not creating my plan are the most common ones I still hear today:

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.

Doing my will seems depressing. Once people actually start working on a will, it brings great peace of mind. It removes uncertainty and ensures 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, please contact Richard at rbuffett@hgo.org or 713-546-0216.
Bill Colburn can’t get enough of Wagner’s *Ring* cycle.

Bill Colburn’s love of Wagner’s *Ring* began in a movie theater. In 1979, the Francis Ford Coppola film *Apocalypse Now* used “The Ride of the Valkyries” from *Die Walküre* to a devastating effect as the backdrop to a fiery helicopter attack. Bill was stunned.

When Bill saw John Boorman’s 1981 film *Excalibur*, his breath was taken away by the recurring theme of “Siegfried’s Funeral March” from *Götterdämmerung* and parts of Orff’s *Carmina Burana*. He became determined to learn more about music.

Now Bill is an invaluable member of the HGO family and is one of our Ring Leaders—a group of key supporters whose leadership contributions have made Houston’s historic, first-ever *Ring* cycle possible.

And Bill knows his way around the *Ring*...he has traveled the world to experience 14 other *Ring* cycles. He caught a *Ring* cycle in Melbourne, Australia, this winter and has trips planned this year to upcoming productions in Berlin and Stockholm. His January 2018 trip to Dresden will mark his 17th *Ring*.

“The more I see of the *Ring*, the more I want to see,” Bill explains.

Bill says that visual innovation is part of what draws him back to HGO productions. “When I walk into an opera house, it’s with the expectation that I’m going to hear beautiful music. But what excites me is, what else are you going to do? Wagner’s *Ring* challenges so many different directors and it is so exciting to see what they come up with,” he says.

Bill also enjoys the relationships he develops with people from all over the world who travel to see the world’s great opera houses—especially the connections he makes with other “Ring Nuts.”

Just like Bill, we can’t wait for the explosive conclusion of the cycle with *Götterdämmerung* this spring. “It has all of the elements that are in the first three, and some that are unique,” says Bill. “The best of everything is in the last opera.”

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**CRAZY ABOUT THE RING**

**Bill Colburn flanked by the giants Fafner and Fasolt from the *Ring* at the Sofia National Opera and Ballet.**

**Book & Lyrics by JIM LUIGS**

**Music by SCOTT WARRENDER**

$40 MEAL & SHOW

Join us for a fast-paced country-western retelling of Wagner’s epic *Ring* cycle, complete with mismatched lovers, a double shotgun wedding and family feuds.

**APRIL 23 | 7 P.M.**

JACKSON STREET BBQ
209 Jackson St.
6:30 p.m. dinner

**APRIL 30 | 7 P.M.**

NEON BOOTS DANCEHALL & SALOON
11410 Hempstead Hwy.
6:30 p.m. dinner

Presented by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc.
A PERFECT FIT

Aspen McArthur was preparing most of her life to be the music librarian at Houston Grand Opera—she just didn’t know it until late in 2015.

While 26-year-old Aspen McArthur fell in love with the viola as a child, she didn’t find her true calling until her student years at Indiana University.

“While I was there as a viola performance major, I was like any college kid—I was broke and needed a job,” Aspen says. Luck was with her: one of the employees in the music library had gotten a job playing for a Broadway show and a replacement was needed immediately. “And I was there,” Aspen says with a smile.

While her goal was originally to play with an opera orchestra, she quickly grew to love her work in the library. “I loved the attention to detail. I think one of the reasons that performance never fully worked for me was that I was such a perfectionist about certain things. In music, you can’t expect perfection—that’s one of the things that’s so human and wonderful about it. But as a librarian, I could make a note look perfect. I could fix things.” She interned with the Philadelphia Orchestra and several festivals. Just prior to coming to HGO, she held a fellowship at New World Symphony.

When Aspen came to visit her boyfriend in Houston during the summer of 2015, she volunteered in the Houston Symphony’s music library and also met Tim Tull, HGO’s longtime music librarian. “We talked about me coming and volunteering at some point if I ever came back to Houston,” she says, with a catch in her voice.

In the aftermath of Tim’s tragic death a month later, some of the contacts Aspen had made in Houston eventually reached out to her about applying for the music librarian position at HGO.

“I was hesitant at first because I knew it was such an incredibly huge job,” says Aspen. “I was mostly trained as a symphonic librarian, but I thought I could at least come and do my best.”

When someone asks her what a music librarian does, Aspen explains simply: a music librarian tries to get the right music to the right place at the right time. But, she adds, “It’s a lot more complicated than that, because you can’t just take music off the shelf and put it in somebody’s hands or on somebody’s stand. Part of getting the right music into the right place is making sure that there aren’t errors in the part and, for example, that the bowings are correct, so the string players are all going the same directions. Ultimately, my job is to make sure that as much rehearsal time as possible can be used for making music.”
STRONGER TOGETHER

The HGO Guild has been the Opera’s staunchest supporter from the beginning.

When HGO began in 1955–56 as a small, regional company, it needed more than just great art and great artists: it needed great friends. From the very beginning, the Houston Grand Opera Guild was the loyal friend our fledgling company needed.

Co-presidents Fred and Imelda Gott joined the HGO Guild out of a desire to meet people who are involved in the arts. “It’s a wonderful feeling to go to the opera and see people that you know, and you can talk about your experiences with people who feel the same way,” says Imelda.

Education is one of the chief priorities of the HGO Guild, which sends docents to area schools to offer engaging, informative presentations on opera. Guild members also host visiting artists, support special events and HGO programs, provide business and clerical services, and act as host families to HGO Studio artists. The Opera Boutique, which sells clothing, accessories, media, and gifts in the Wortham Theater Center’s lobby before performances and during intermission, is run entirely by the HGO Guild, and 100% of the proceeds support the Opera.

HGO is deeply appreciative of the HGO Guild, which strengthens our community and makes it possible for us to do great work both on and off the stage. Thank you!

Find out how you can join the fun at a volunteer gathering for current and prospective members.

June 7, 6:30 p.m.
United Way of Greater Houston
50 Waugh Dr.
For information, telephone 713-546-0269 or visit hgoguild.org.

If you grew up in Houston, there’s a good chance that your very first exposure to the magic of the performing arts was under the stars at an amphitheater in one of the loveliest spots in town.

This year, thanks to the generous supporters of HGO’s NEXUS affordability initiative and our good friends at Miller Outdoor Theatre, Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds get to join the fun with two free performances of Donizetti’s The Elixir of Love on May 19 and 20, at 8 p.m.

With incredible music and a hilarious story, it’s the perfect entry point to the world of opera for the young and the young-at-heart.

HGO is deeply grateful to the lead supporters who make it possible for countless Houstonians to experience the thrill of world-class opera without the barrier of cost through the NEXUS Initiative. Our deepest thanks go out to these supporters:

Anchorage Foundation of Texas; The Brown Foundation, Inc.; The Wortham Foundation, Inc.; Nabors Industries; Shell Oil Company; MD Anderson Cancer Center; M.D. Anderson Foundation; The HGO Guild; and Miller Outdoor Theatre.

OPERA AL FRESCO

HGO has presented free public performances at Miller Outdoor Theatre since 1957—making 2017 the 60th anniversary of a partnership that makes beautiful music together.
Nixon in China
HGO’s cast, headed by baritone Scott Hendricks in his role debut as the former president, stands up confidently against the waves of orchestral sound and the murderously high vocal lines.
—Texas Classical Review

James Robinson’s staging was an imaginative and probing realization of the story. Allen Moyer’s sets, backed by a great red wall, and smartly lit by Paul Palazzo, made much of rows of circa-1970 console televisions showing newsreels from the Nixon trip.
—Dallas News

One thing is clear: after 30 years, Nixon in China has clearly claimed its rightful place in the grand opera repertory.
—CultureMap

Verdi Requiem
Music Director Patrick Summers deployed the full HGO musical forces on Friday evening to deliver a massive performance. In fact, Chorus Master Richard Bado put 120 choristers on the stage, 40 more singers than he used for Aida. Add to that another 60-plus members of the orchestra, 12 trumpets in the balconies and a marvelous quartet of soloists and you have everything this work requires—and deserves.
—Theater Jones

The HGO Chorus brought the Requiem’s opening plea not only grace and clarity, but moments of tenderness that made it for once sound like a farewell to loved ones rather than the beginning of a quasi-operatic showpiece. The group unleashed thunderclaps in the “Dies irae,” lent fullness to the “Lacrymosa” and brought vigor and brightness to the “Sanctus.”
—Texas Classical Review