As Nixon in China returns to Houston to mark its 30th birthday, HGO celebrates a legacy of commissioning new opera—and the generosity of the donors who make it possible.

When the Wortham Theater Center first opened its doors 30 years ago, audiences were hungry for something new. Key supporters helped make possible a pivotal new work that brought new voices, a new sound, and a contemporary story to the stage.

John Adams and Alice Goodman’s Nixon in China did exactly that—it was an opera like nobody had ever seen before. It used powerful music and poetry to depict an event that had happened only 15 years before the premiere, an event that was still fresh in the memory of the audience.

In a shocking departure from traditional opera, Nixon in China dealt with real, living, and familiar characters. Part satire, part epic, and in part a serious examination of historical and philosophical issues, the opera portrays President Richard M. Nixon and Chairman Mao Tse-tung with compassion, humor, and poignancy.

Thirty years later, Nixon in China remains one of the company’s most significant world premieres. It’s been performed in opera houses all over the world, televised on PBS, and recorded twice. It won HGO our first Emmy and our second Grammy Award. It
"Nixon in China was my first opera, and much to my surprise—and probably to some of those who attended the premiere and emerged from the theater scratching their heads—it’s continued to enjoy a healthy afterlife, with productions almost every year in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Australia.

“Were it not for the support of HGO… I doubt I would have embarked on a career of composing operas.”
—John Adams

has a lasting legacy and returns to the stage that launched it at a moment that will resonate with today’s audience: The opera opens on Inauguration Day—January 20, 2017—perfect timing for people reflecting on the role of media in shaping the perception of presidential figures. It’s sure to ignite a number of provocative conversations in the lobby of the Wortham, just as it did in 1987.

HGO has an international reputation for innovation: this season’s production of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer’s It’s a Wonderful Life is our 62nd world premiere. We can’t produce these new works without supporters like you. When you take a leap of faith and support bold new works, it helps HGO continue to blaze the trail, redefining the role of art in contemporary society and breathing new life into the art form.

The 2017 production of Nixon in China is generously supported by Vinson & Elkins, LLP; Boulware & Valoir; Frost Bank; and the National Endowment for the Arts. Thank you!
A TRIP TO THE OPERA

Going to the opera is a magical experience, and thanks to your generosity, HGO can continue to bring great art to thousands of young people.

On November 1 and 3, HGO presented Donizetti’s The Elixir of Love to young Houstonians during two Student Matinees for grades 4–8 and one High School Night performance for grades 9–12 on November 9. A total of 4,018 young people came to the Wortham Theater Center from two community colleges, 15 homeschool groups, and 65 Houston area schools.

We got lots of wonderful comments from parents and teachers, and we love that. But it’s even more important to us what the kids think. After all, this is for them. Here are just a few reactions from students at Deepwater Junior High:

“I liked the way that the singers were able to project their voices and move while singing.”

“I love how they act while singing in another language! This was my first time to the opera.”

“Everybody there was really nice and they were dressed very nice. I really loved how you could see so much from the seats that we were in. I hope that I will be able to go back.”

When you support HGO, you’re opening a door to an unparalleled experience for young people—and the impact of that first experience will echo far into the future. Thank you!
Turning 40 is a big milestone, for a person or an institution.

Being 40 is really the best of both worlds—at 40, a person is tried and proven, and yet still young and vigorous. We think that’s a great description of the HGO Studio at 40.

When the HGO Studio was established in 1977, it was one of the first comprehensive, season-long young artist training programs in the country. The mission? To prepare young artists who had completed their academic training for the “real world” of professional life, including performance experience with a top-tier company.

Every year, hundreds of singers and pianists audition for a place in the HGO Studio through the Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers, established in 1989. The final round of that competition—the Concert of Arias, held this year on January 27—is always one of the most exciting evenings of the season.

The past two winners of the super-prestigious Richard Tucker Award—Tamara Wilson and Jamie Barton—are HGO Studio alumnae. The HGO Studio has produced such luminaries as Joyce DiDonato, Eric Halfvarson, Ana María Martínez, Susanne Mentzer, Eric Owens, and Albina Shagimuratova. A host of other alumni enjoy wonderful international careers doing what they love best.

Brian Speck, director of the HGO Studio since January 2015, looks to the future: “As the HGO Studio enters its fifth decade, I think we have a lot to celebrate. We have 12 of the very best young artists in the world with us now. We’re developing strong artists by providing tools to build a solid foundation of technique and artistry, which will continue to serve the artists as the art form continues to evolve and change. My goal is always to enable the special, individual qualities of each artist to shine.”
Justin Mitchell has been an opera lover for years, but something magical happened to him at The Wortham Theater Center in the winter of 2012: he went on a blind date with Katherine Butler. Justin’s sister knew that the two of them would hit it off, and Justin hoped that Katherine would enjoy opera as much as he did. (They did, and she does.)

Over four years later, Justin insisted that Katherine join him on a Thursday night backstage tour of the Wortham, led by HGO Managing Director Perryn Leech. Katherine belongs to a number of volunteer organizations and had already gone on a backstage tour with the Junior League of Houston—so it took some convincing and the promise of dinner afterward to get her attend.

Katherine had no idea that Justin had made arrangements with HGO Development staffers Jennifer Wijangco and Andrea Ward to make this trip to the opera house one they would never forget.

“As Perryn was speaking to a group of patrons about the elaborate set for Donizetti’s *The Elixir of Love*, Justin pulled Katherine off to the side. As this was the location of their first date, he wanted to get a special picture with her on stage. He handed his phone to Jennifer to take the photo, and then he got down on one knee.

“I was quite nervous,” Justin said. “It was fine until they shined a spotlight on me. But as soon as I got the words out and she said ‘yes,’ I felt better.”

Justin and Katherine are still planning the details of their wedding, but knowing their tastes, one thing is certain: their future will be filled with beautiful music.

Justin is an attorney with a background in maritime law working as general counsel for a seismic company, and Katherine will soon finish her MBA at Rice University. They’re active members of HGO’s Young Patrons Circle, a special group of HGO supporters under the age of 40.

“It’s been a lot of fun,” Justin says. “We’ve met some interesting people from all over the world and made a lot of good friends. This is one of the best opera companies in the world. This is something we plan on doing for a long time.”

We’re honored to have Justin and Katherine as members of the HGO family. We thank them for letting us be a part of their story and for reminding us that this is a place where magic and romance aren’t limited to the performers. Congratulations!
The Elixir of Love

[T]he opera requires singers to be technically amazing while pattering through a silly plot—an amalgamation that Houston Grand Opera expertly masters…With the dexterous [Jane] Glover in the pit and [Nicole] Heaston on the stage, I could relish the inanity of this plot night after night.

—Houstonia

Faust

At Houston Grand Opera, Gounod’s Faust offers up a devilishly good time…This is a terrific production of one of the grandest of grand operas.

—Theater Jones

It’s a Wonderful Life

Judged by its best moments…the opera is nothing short of bold. The final melody soars — a moment of redemption. George Bailey would be proud.

—Houston Chronicle

Q: What did you enjoy most about your first year as an HGO Patron?

JULIE & CARL PASCOE

Our first year as HGO Patrons has opened up a wonderful new dimension of the opera experience for us. Patronage provides so many enriching benefits—from exclusive backstage tours and dramaturg-led seminars to special receptions to meet rising operatic stars. We now feel a part of the HGO family rather than just an occasional member of the audience. As native Houstonians, we are so very proud to support Houston Grand Opera, which has helped define the world-class arts culture of our beloved city.

KELLIE ELDER & DAVID HALPERT

Being an HGO Patron has enhanced our enjoyment of the opera by providing an opportunity to meet other Patrons. We have discovered several existing friends in the society, as well. The amenities are great, the people are even better.

NICK SHEA

Becoming an HGO Young Patron in 2016 greatly enhanced my ability to meet other people in Houston who both appreciate and are excited by the arts. The inviting nature of the HGO community and the opportunities that are offered to us, such as the Opera Unwrapped series, have allowed me to learn much more about the technical and historical components of opera over this past year. I’m looking forward to being involved as a Patron in 2017.