Nothing speaks to the human spirit quite like music does. That’s why on May 22, HGO’s Patrick Summers and Perryn Leech made an exciting announcement at the Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion in Hermann Park that was streamed live to HGO’s Facebook page: Over the next six seasons, HGO will be seeking the human spirit.

Seeking the Human Spirit is a groundbreaking, all-inclusive, company-wide initiative that will impact more lives than anything we’ve ever done before—and it couldn’t come at a more important time than now.

In the past, we’ve done series of operas focused on a single composer, like Britten and Janáček, and most recently, we concluded our first-ever presentation of Wagner’s incredible Ring cycle. Seeking the Human Spirit will do something no other opera company has ever attempted: it will program works and community activities that focus on spiritual questions.

For every season of the initiative, three of our mainstage operas will be part of Seeking the Human Spirit. From rarely performed masterpieces to bold new commissions, these operas will do more than ever before.
HGO has announced the first two seasons of Seeking the Human Spirit operas, and you won’t want to miss any of these special productions. Each one is thrilling, innovative, and sure to inspire meaningful conversations about profound spiritual questions.

- **October 2017:** Verdi’s *La traviata*, featuring Albina Shagimuratova as Violetta Valéry, the Parisian courtesan whose stunning act of selfless love brings opera lovers back to the theater time after time. A new production by Arin Arbus.

- **December 2017:** The world premiere of Ricky Ian Gordon and Royce Vavrek’s *The House without a Christmas Tree*, a family-friendly holiday opera with Lauren Snouffer as young Addie Mills, whose gruff father (Daniel Belcher) refuses to allow a Christmas tree in the house. Heidi Stober plays the adult Addie.

- **April 2018:** Bellini’s *Norma*, a powerful reworking of the Greek tragedy *Medea*, with Liudmyla Monastyrska in the title role of the Druid priestess and Jamie Barton as her rival Adalgisa.

- **October 2018:** Wagner’s *The Flying Dutchman*, with Andrzej Dobber as the Dutchman, a doomed mariner who needs to win the love of Senta (Rachel Willis-Sørensen) or else remain cursed.

- **January 2019:** Catán’s *Florencia en el Amazonas*, a story about truly transformative love, with Ana María Martínez as Florencia and directed by Francesca Zambello.

- **April 2019:** The world premiere of *The Phoenix* by Tarik O’Regan and John Caird, which explores the American chapter in the life of Mozart librettist Lorenzo da Ponte, as his life takes him on a spiritual journey. Featuring Thomas Hampson and Luca Pisaroni.

Beyond the main stage, Seeking the Human Spirit means launching exciting and innovative partnerships with educational organizations, health and social service providers, and cultural institutions to explore the role of art and spirituality in contemporary Houston.

We are working alongside Houston Methodist to explore music’s power to heal through a unique music therapy program. We are teaming up with our arts colleagues at Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, to discover ways both music and the visual arts can speak to the soul and unite people of all backgrounds. The Jung Center will host lectures on Seeking the Human Spirit themes, and the iconic Rothko Chapel will be home to a number of community discussions.

In a moment when the culture seems so focused on that which divides us, Seeking the Human Spirit will use the power of music to illuminate the values and ideas that unify us.

We’re teaming up with Sacred Sites Quest to introduce Houston high school students to sacred spaces in the city and throughout the world, and these students will build their own landmark labyrinth inspired by music. We’re also working with the Women’s Home/Institute for Spirituality and Health, a nonprofit organization for housing and support services designed to help prevent and end homelessness for Houston women.

In a moment when the culture seems so focused on that which divides us, Seeking the Human Spirit will use the power of music to illuminate the values than just enlighten and entertain. They will ask deep spiritual questions that foster a conversation that goes far beyond the curtain. Each season’s Seeking the Human Spirit operas will be centered on a theme; the first two seasons will focus on Sacrifice and Transformation, respectively.
and ideas that unify us. Nothing brings people together like great music, and nothing reveals deeper insights into human nature than the sharing of timeless stories.

Houston is ready for something new and profound, for something that channels all the optimism and energy of this vibrant community into something good. We’re looking for universal truths about the human condition, and we’re bringing the power of beautiful music with us on the quest.

We can’t wait to see where this adventure takes us, and most of all, we can’t wait to experience it with you.

For more information on supporting Seeking the Human Spirit, please contact Greg Robertson at 713-546-0274.

**SHAPING THE FUTURE OF OPERA**

HGO’s Young Artists Vocal Academy offers a rare opportunity for undergraduate students.

When mezzo-soprano Siphokazi Molteno came all the way from South Africa to participate in the 2017 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias, her performance was so stirring that she won both the Audience Choice Award and the Ana María Martínez Encouragement Award. It was clear that this was a relationship we wanted to continue.

Siphokazi had the longest journey to make in order to participate in Concert of Arias, so we were thrilled that we could bring her back to Houston to participate in YAVA—HGO’s Young Artists Vocal Academy. This was possible because of generous support from Robin Angly, Richard Leibman of Frosch International Travel, and Doreen and Basil Joffe.

This week-long course for singers at the undergraduate level offers talented young singers like Siphokazi classes in subjects such as characterization, score preparation, movement, and career development. Individual training includes daily voice lessons with HGO Studio Director of Vocal Instruction Stephen King and vocal and dramatic coachings.

“I find these young, hopeful, and talented artists so inspiring,” says HGO Studio Director Brian Speck, who oversees YAVA. “We expose them to ideas and experiences that help them to think beyond the walls of their conservatory or university, and envision the career that lies ahead.”

HGO Studio alumni Ben Edquist and Megan Mikailovna Samarin participated in YAVA, as did current artist Mane Galoyan.

HGO is proud to be the only opera company in the country with a pipeline of training opportunities for emerging operatic talent that extends from the high school level (Bauer Family High School Voice Studio), to the collegiate level (YAVA), to the postgraduate level with the HGO Studio.
PARTY ON! Young professionals rock the Wortham.

On April 8, over 100 guests kept the 2017 Opera Ball going into the early morning hours at the Encore Opera Ball After Party. Building on the Opera Ball theme of Carnevale di Venezia, the young professional crowd enjoyed frozen bellinis and snacked on cicchetti (Italian street food) by City Kitchen Catering. Encore chairmen Carrie and Sverre Brandsberg-Dahl even led the crowd in a midnight flash mob with tunes provided by DJ Whitney Fierce.

SINGING FOR THEIR SUMMER

Returning HGO Studio tenor Yongzhao Yu and baritone Sol Jin will approach their roles in HGO’s production of La traviata with an extra measure of confidence in the fall: in July, they sang Alfredo and Giorgio Germont at the Aspen Music Festival. They will repeat those roles in select performances at HGO this fall, with another returning HGO Studio artist, Mane Galoyan, as their Violetta.

Like Aspen, Wolf Trap Opera is a rich source of summer opportunities for young artists. Located near Washington, D.C., Wolf Trap offered productions of La pietra del paragone, Tosca, and The Juniper Tree, and the casts of all three were well represented by HGO Studio artists. La pietra del paragone featured current HGO Studio mezzo Zoie Reams, departing mezzo Megan Mikailovna Samarin, and incoming bass Anthony Robin Schneider. If you hurry, you can still catch an August performance of The Juniper Tree with Megan Mikailovna Samarin, departing baritone Ben Edquist, and incoming countertenor Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen.

Incoming pianist/coach Blair Salter gets the globetrotter award: her summer gigs encompass Michigan Opera Theatre, Miami Music Festival, and Orford Music Academy in her native Canada.

Returning sopranos Yelena Dyachek and Mane Galoyan went to Aspen and pianist/coach Peter Walsh to the Ravinia Steans Music Institute. Incoming artists headed for Santa Fe Opera (tenor Richard Smagur), Aspen (pianist/coach Jonathan Gmeinder), and San Francisco Opera’s Merola Program (baritone Thomas Glass).
DON’T NEED A WILL? THINK AGAIN.

Just do it. Your heirs will thank you.

Does everyone need a will? The straight answer is yes. That’s true even for people who think they don’t have a dime to leave to anyone. What if something unexpected happens and your estate wins a $1 million settlement? Who gets the money?

There are ways to get around having a will. For example, with a payable-on-death account, you can leave your money to a named beneficiary and there is no limit to how much money you can leave in this way.

But there are hitches to any no-will scheme:
- A random financial asset almost always turns up.
- If you have a will, you’ll have named an executor to cash checks, pay creditors, and distribute any money or property to your beneficiaries.
- When there’s no will, state law dictates who gets the house, car, savings, and other assets.

Lawyers are the best resource for reliable wills. Your lawyer will also remind you that you need a durable power of attorney and a health care proxy, so someone can manage your finances and make medical choices if you’re unable to do so yourself.

Remember: just do it—your heirs will thank you. And if you include HGO in your will, you become a partner in perpetuating the art form that we love for future generations.

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

JOIN US!

Why should everyone else have all the fun? Become an HGO Patron!

Great things happen when you become a member of HGO’s Patrons Circle. Scott Ipsen, our outstanding director of Patron services, becomes your personal ticket concierge. You receive complimentary valet parking, access to the Masterson Green Room at the Wortham, and invitations to exclusive entertainment and travel opportunities—like our recent HGO Patron trip to Italy!

But you get so much more than behind-the-scenes access and exclusive benefits. You become connected to a family of people who share your belief that great art matters. Whether you’re learning more about an upcoming production at an Opera Unwrapped presentation or discussing a performance with new friends in the Green Room, becoming more involved with HGO is a deeply rewarding experience.

The only thing more gratifying than experiencing an incredible night at the opera is knowing that you helped make it possible. HGO is one of the greatest opera companies in the world because of our Patrons—and we can’t wait for you to join us.

For more information on joining HGO’s Patrons Circle, please contact Jennifer Wijangco at 713-546-0704 or jwijangco@hgo.org.
IN THE MEDIA

Mozart's The Abduction from the Seraglio

[The singers’] rendering of Abduction was light and sleek one moment, melancholy and moving the next.

Staging the opera on a train, with Moyer’s eloquent architecture and the exquisite furnishings, utterly transformed the theater. The low ceiling of the train relative to the normal height of an opera stage created the intimacy of longing but also the claustrophobia of captivity. Tight quarters made marvelous options for close physical comedy, concentrated and amplified the singers, and showcased Mozart’s marvelous groupings.

—CultureMap

Wagner's Götterdammerung

…Patrick Summers works the orchestra, demanding the instrumentalists’ utmost energy during each crescendo as his baton frothed up the air. Audiences often speak of singers’ tremendous stamina in the Ring, yet the orchestra’s ability to maintain an unwavering quality was just as impressive.

[Christine] Goerke, in the end, is every bit the star that this production deserves. But [Andrea] Silvestrelli’s Hagen, Ryan McKinny’s Gunther, and Heidi Melton’s Gutrune match her virtuosic spirit with their own give-it-their-all showcase.

—Houston Chronicle