For five nights this coming February, the earth beneath the Wortham Theater Center will shake with the sheer power of 120 of the most beautiful voices you will ever hear: the world renowned HGO Chorus. It will be the largest chorus Houston Grand Opera has ever put on stage, and the effect is going to be thrilling. For the first time ever, HGO presents Verdi’s Requiem.

A large chorus for an opera is one of 80 voices. With an additional 40 voices required, expenses for the HGO Chorus are commensurately higher—so we need your help to bring this history-making performance to life. For 120 hours, beginning September 26 and ending September 30—HGO supporters like you have an exciting opportunity.

To help make this experience as powerful and dramatic as the music deserves, HGO is hosting an online giving opportunity called 120 Voices: A Campaign for HGO’s Requiem Chorus. We’re asking our supporters to consider sponsoring a chorister for $2,500—the cost of each chorister’s rehearsal and performance fees for Requiem. You can sponsor your favorite HGO chorister—or an entire section!

During those 120 hours, thanks to a generous HGO supporter, all gifts will be matched dollar for dollar up to $100,000. That means every gift is doubly significant, no matter what the size.

Under the direction of Chorus Master Richard Bado since 1988, your HGO Chorus has never sounded better. With the upcoming choral demands of Faust and Götterdämmerung, it’s perfect timing for a production that shines the spotlight on this phenomenal group of artists. When the HGO Chorus meets the challenge of Verdi’s Requiem in outstanding style, it will be a moving experience for the entire HGO family.

120 stellar voices in the HGO Chorus for Verdi’s Requiem this season. You can raise your voice to support them without singing a note—here’s how.

Every major opera house in the world does the Verdi Requiem, and it’s time for HGO to step up to the plate.

—Richard Bado, HGO Chorus Master

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2
“In its 62-year history, the company has never done this,” explains Bado. “Every major opera house in the world does the Verdi Requiem, and it’s time for HGO to step up to the plate.”

Presenting the Requiem is something that Bado has been “chomping at the bit for decades” to do ever since he was a college freshman and was “bowled over” by the experience of singing in the chorus. He calls the Requiem “dynamic, dramatic, and awe-inspiring.”

Of course the Requiem is not an opera, but it is so powerful that it has been called “Verdi’s greatest opera” and “an opera in disguise.” The challenges and the process of preparing the chorus are the same as they would be with an opera, says Bado, but since no rehearsal time has to be set aside for staging, he and the chorus can “just focus on the music and the incredible drama within the music.”

For his Requiem, Verdi composed some of the most challenging, intricate choral work in the history of classical music. HGO’s Requiem features four incredible soloists: Richard Tucker Award–winning soprano Angela Meade; alto Sasha Cooke, who wowed audiences as Magnolia Hawks in 2013’s Show Boat; tenor Alexey Dolgov, whom HGO audiences will remember as Cavaradossi from last season’s Tosca, among other roles; and bass Peixin Chen, an HGO Studio alumnus who most recently sang Dr. Bartolo in last season’s The Marriage of Figaro.

“Audiences can expect a great piece of drama that showcases not only the four great soloists, but also our own forces of the HGO Orchestra and Chorus,” says Bado. “Doing Verdi’s Requiem is a major accomplishment for our company. It will make a dramatic statement and an artistic statement to our community. Supporting the Requiem means you’re really supporting the home team.”

Starting on September 26, you will have 120 hours to support 120 voices. To learn more, visit 120voices.org now. The only thing more thrilling than experiencing this HGO first will be knowing that you helped to make it possible.
IT'S A WONDERFUL OPERA!
Get a sneak peek at HGO’s newest holiday opera.

For many people, nothing says “holidays” any better than watching a rerun (or two or three!) of the beloved 1946 Frank Capra film It's a Wonderful Life.

But when you come to the Cullen Theater in December to see the world premiere of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer’s opera It's a Wonderful Life, don’t expect it to be just a musical version of the film that inspired it.

“I have to bring what Jake and Gene have created to life as if there’s never been anything before it,” said director Leonard Foglia in early July when he came to HGO for a design presentation. “I’ve stayed away from the film entirely.”

In developing concepts for operas he directs, Foglia says he bases all his work on the music, and it was no different with It's a Wonderful Life. “From the first notes, you’ll know you’re in a magical world. The music is very sweet,” Foglia says. The overall tone of the opera is one of mystery and wonder, as opposed to the film, which is a straightforward narrative.

The basic plot from the film underpins the opera: It is Christmas Eve, and an angel, in this case, Clara, is assigned to help a human being, George Bailey, who is so despondent that he is planning to take his own life. Like the angel Clarence in the film, Clara is an Angel Second Class and if she can help George, she will finally earn her wings.

But in a departure from the film inspired by the otherworldly music, all the action takes place from Clara’s perspective and in her realm. Seventy mirrored doors represent portals in time and space, which Clara uses to piece together the events of George’s life in an effort to understand what has brought him to this moment of despair. Mirrors and lights create a “weird world that’s beautiful to look at,” Foglia says.

Complete with a quartet of flying angels who assist Clara, four big dance numbers, a feathered turbo booster that stops time, and a sing-along at the end of the opera, It's a Wonderful Life is perfect for children and families.
The donor-driven Student Performance Series plants the seeds for a lifetime love of opera.

When you meet a fellow opera lover, your conversation almost always finds its way to this question: “How did you first come to love this art form?” There’s always a story there. Maybe it was a parent or a teacher who first played a classical music recording for you. Maybe you were dragged to the opera on a date, not expecting to fall in love with the music. Maybe a coworker handed you an extra ticket and your life was changed forever by the timeless magic of opera.

At HGO, we know that your first exposure to opera is a step into a more beautiful, fascinating world. That’s why it thrills us to introduce children to opera during our annual Student Performance Series. Every year, this donor-funded series brings over 6,000 students to the Wortham Theater Center to experience live opera. For many of them, it’s the chance of a lifetime.

“In a school like Reagan, or in the neighborhood or environment we grew up in, we never really heard, ‘Let’s go to the opera,’” Reagan High School senior Denise Morales said about High School Night at the Opera. “It shows us how to be in different environments that we might not be comfortable in. But we get to experience something that’s so cultural.”

Thanks to generous HGO supporters like yourself, HGO presents a shortened version of Donizetti’s beloved, family-friendly opera The Elixir of Love to young Houstonians during two Student Matinees for grades 4–8 on November 1 and 3, and one full-length High School Night performance for grades 9–12 on November 9, 2016.

This bright, bubbly production is updated to the 1950s Italian Riviera, complete with Vespas and hot air balloons. Its colorful sets and a zany comedic plot will be the perfect introduction to opera, and we know that many of the children in the audience will be hooked for life.

HGO is proud to be a true cultural service provider to Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds, reaching out to underserved schools to provide an opportunity that children might not otherwise have. On average, one-third of our annual Student Performance Series audience attends for free.

Garret Reed, an ESL teacher at Lee High School, wrote about his international students: “Few, if any, have ever had the opportunity to enjoy the fine arts. They’ve lived on the economic and social margins of their countries. So their excursion to HGO was a first for them—‘first contact,’ if you will, with a world that they would never have experienced in their countries. Thanks a million.”

Your support of Houston Grand Opera makes it possible for us to provide this vital first exposure to the arts to young people, and keeps the magic of opera alive for future generations. Thank you!
Opera, art, and social gatherings were at the center of the week’s activities when a group of Houston Grand Opera Patrons traveled to Santa Fe, New Mexico, in July. The group enjoyed three productions at the spectacular open-air Santa Fe Opera house, including *Don Giovanni*, *La fanciulla del West*, and the premiere of an exciting new production of *Roméo et Juliette*, clearly the crowd favorite, featuring Ailyn Pérez and Stephen Costello in the title roles.

Patrons also embarked on a guided day trip to Abiquiú, New Mexico, for a special behind-the-scenes tour of Ghost Ranch, the site of Georgia O’Keeffe’s summer home. The ranch’s dramatic landscapes were often the subjects of O’Keeffe’s paintings.

Highlighting the trip, however, were the social gatherings hosted in true Southwest style by fellow HGO Patrons Meg Boulware and Hartley Hampton, Connie and Bryon Dyer, Elizabeth and Albert Kidd, and Janie and Wayne Patterson. Our hats go off to all of them for their remarkable hospitality!
Q: What are you most looking forward to in the 2016–17 season?

GREG ROBERTSON
CHIEF ADVANCEMENT OFFICER

It’s like ice cream…all of it is great. I can’t wait to hear Patrick Carfizzi sing both Dr. Dulcamara in *The Elixir of Love* and Henry Kissinger in *Nixon in China*. Two great roles that demand a great theatrical singer!

KELLY LANING
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING

I cannot wait to see *Faust*! Not only have we not done it since 2007, but Ana María Martínez is one of my favorite female artists. PLUS, Michael Fabiano is making his HGO debut and, well, while he’s great to listen to, he’s also great to look at!

NORMA CORTEZ
HEAD OF COSTUMES

As always, looking forward to our new build—*It’s a Wonderful Life*—starting from swatches, to mock-ups, to creating the real costume pieces.

PATTIMA SINGHALAKA
ART DIRECTOR

I like to see the artists and creative team around the Wortham and hear them rehearsing or speaking in other languages. Also to put a name to the actual face is like meeting a celebrity. As for an actual performance, I can’t wait to hear the Verdi Requiem.

LEE WHATLEY
DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS ANALYTICS

I am most looking forward to the much underrated Mozart opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. I always love James Robinson productions—besides being a good director, he works trains into the set and as a bonus, beloved HGO Studio alumna Albina Shagimuratova returns as Konstanze.

OPENING NIGHT DINNER CELEBRATION

HONORING  Anne and Dr. John Mendelsohn
CHAIRMEN  Mary and Dr. Mark D’Andrea
           Valerie and Tracy Dieterich

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2016
7:00 P.M.  Donizetti’s *The Elixir of Love*

Post-performance Celebration Dinner on Ray C. Fish Plaza
Wortham Theater Center  |  Black Tie

For information, contact Clare Greene at 713-546-0377 or cgreene@hgo.org