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Houston Grand Opera's 2015–16 Season Features World Premieres, Next Installment in Company's First *Ring* Cycle, and Productions New to Houston

Houston, January 29, 2015—Houston Grand Opera's (HGO) 2015–16 season showcases the vibrant and diverse artistic mix that marks HGO as a leading 21st-century American opera company: Wagner's *Siegfried*, the third installment of La Fura dels Baus's imaginative *Ring* cycle featuring a new generation of Wagnerians; the world premiere of Carlisle Floyd's *Prince of Players*; Dvořák's fairy tale rarity *Rusalka*; a holiday revival of family favorite *The Little Prince* from the award-winning composer Rachel Portman and librettist Nicholas Wright; a new production of *The Marriage of Figaro* and a new-to-Houston *Eugene Onegin*; a beloved core production, *Tosca*; and the Houston debut of Broadway sensation Rob Ashford's take on the classic musical *Carousel*. Through its community collaboration program HGOco, the company will present two additional world premieres: *O Columbia*, a chamber opera by composer Gregory Spears and librettist Royce Vavrek that examines the past, present, and future of the American spirit of exploration; and another chamber opera, by composer David Hanlon and librettist Stephanie Fleischmann, about the impact of hurricanes on the Texas Gulf coast.

HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers notes, "Operas are sometimes built around lofty themes, attempting to illuminate something higher than 'mere' humanity. But, excitingly, the entirety of HGO's 2015–16 season is built around idealistic characters engaged in epic and universal human journeys, and through them we connect to our own journeys. The centerpiece of our season, Carlisle Floyd's daring *Prince of Players*, is about the theater of life itself, and the variously painful and joyous meanings of the word *façade*."

HGO Managing Director Perryn Leech adds, "The *Ring* represents the most ambitious of operatic tradition, and *Prince of Players* honors HGO's great tradition of embracing the new. *The Little Prince*, which HGO premiered in 2003, is now a beloved family staple, and the two HGOco commissions draw directly on stories that shaped the region. The breadth of this season's offerings will connect with and enrich our community's cultural life from many vantage points."

Details of these upcoming Houston Grand Opera productions are provided below, and more information is available at the company's website: HGO.org.

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***Siegfried*: American premiere of cutting-edge production showcases a new generation of Wagnerians (April 16–May 1)**

HGO's first installment of Catalan theater company La Fura dels Baus's visionary *Ring* cycle was deemed "thoroughly mesmerizing" (*Houston Press*). As *Opera News* put it, "The extraordinary quality of this production lies in how effectively it unleashes the potential and profoundest significances of the... story." Along with director Carlus Padrissa's cutting-edge visuals and acrobats in tableaux of human scenery, the groundbreaking cycle also features a stellar cast of rising Wagnerians.

In HGO's third installment of the epic cycle, *Siegfried*, Scottish bass-baritone Iain Paterson returns to continue his first staged performances as Wotan/The Wanderer, and the fiendishly difficult title role will be sung by American tenor Jay Hunter Morris, whose last-minute portrayal at the Met in 2011, characterized by "admirably clean and clear singing" (*New York Times*), brought him international accolades. Morris recently gave tour-de-force performances as The Narrator in HGO's world premiere of Iain Bell and Simon Callow's *A Christmas Carol*. He is joined by Christine Goerke, continuing her first staged U.S. appearances as Brünnhilde. After hearing Goerke sing Strauss in 2013, *New Yorker* critic Alex Ross proclaimed her "the most potent dramatic soprano to appear at the Met since—well let's not jinx her by naming names." Filipino tenor Rodell Rosel returns as an "appropriately acidic" (*Dallas Morning News*) Mime.

Patrick Summers, who achieved "exceptionally rich orchestral color" (*Opera News*) in *Das Rheingold*, will lead from the pit.

***Prince of Players*: world premiere by American master composer Carlisle Floyd (March 5–13)**

HGO's ties with composer Carlisle Floyd, the Lynn Wyatt Great Artist 2015–16, are among the longest of any opera company and composer in history, spanning nearly 40 years. In 1976, HGO premiered Floyd's *Bilby's Doll*, the first of four Floyd world premieres by HGO, including *Willie Stark* (1981), *The Passion of Jonathan Wade* (new version, 1991), and *Cold Sassy Tree* (2000). In 1977, Floyd joined HGO General Director David Gockley in co-founding and co-directing the Houston Grand Opera Studio, one of the nation's first professional training programs sponsored by an opera company.

Now HGO is proud to premiere the 88-year-old composer's latest opera, *Prince of Players*. A chamber opera in two acts, the opera departs from the American subjects that occupied Floyd's previous operatic work. Instead, it is a high-spirited period piece that examines the fluidity of sexuality and gender roles. *Prince of Players* is based on the play *Compleat Female Stage Beauty* by Jeffrey Hatcher and tells the story of Edward Kynaston, the last female impersonator actor in 17th-century England.

English director Michael Gieleta will make his HGO debut with this production, and Patrick Summers will conduct. The cast will be announced at a later date.

***Rusalka*: evocative new-to-Houston production features Houston favorite Ana María Martínez in title role (January 29–February 12)**

HGO presents Dvořák’s lyrical fairy tale for the first time since 1990, in a production by the Tony and Olivier nominated theater director Melly Still that premiered at Glyndebourne in 2009. That production featured Houston favorite soprano Ana María Martínez (Lynn Wyatt Great Artist 2010–11) as the ill-fated wood nymph Rusalka, a role she reprised last year at Lyric Opera of Chicago and will also perform at HGO. Critical to the performance is the character’s ability to hold the stage after surrendering her power of speech in exchange for becoming human. *Opera News* declared Martínez’s portrayal to be “one of the great soprano performances of the present era” in that house.

The Prince will be sung by the American tenor Brian Jagde in his HGO debut. A winner of the Birgit Nilsson Prize at the Operalia competition, he is an alumnus of San Francisco Opera’s Merola and Adler young artist programs. Richard Paul Fink, an HGO Studio alumnus who was last seen at HGO in *Lobengrin* (2009), will sing Vodník, the Water Goblin.

Rusalka will be conducted by Harry Bicket, chief conductor of Santa Fe Opera and music director of The English Concert.

***The Little Prince*: revival of popular HGO commission continues cycle of holiday operas (December 4–20)**

For the 2003 world premiere production of *The Little Prince*, commissioned through a generous gift of Kathryn and David Berg in honor of Larry Pfeffer, HGO brought together a stellar creative team: composer Rachel Portman, whose score for the film *Emma* won an Oscar and who has since penned the scores to *Beloved* and *Belle*; British librettist Nicholas Wright, an Olivier Award–winning theater director; and Francesca Zambello, a long-time collaborator with HGO who is now artistic director of Washington National Opera and the Glimmerglass Festival. The sets and costumes were designed by the late Maria Bjørnson of *Phantom of the Opera* fame. Based on the classic children’s story by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, this appealing work has been called “an enchanting opera that is both faithful to the book and satisfying to the child and adult alike” (*Financial Times*). *The Little Prince* returned to HGO in December 2004, and has been performed across the country as well as on BBC television in the U.K.

In this production, HGO Studio alumnus Joshua Hopkins reprises his 2004 portrayal of The Pilot, in which he displayed a “clarion baritone and an appealing, warm stage presence” (*Houston Press*). HGO’s Bradley Moore conducts in his HGO main-stage debut; the remainder of the cast will be announced at a later date.

***The Marriage of Figaro*: Michael Grandage’s nimble new production; role debuts for Ailyn Pérez and Lauren Snouffer (January 22–February 7)**

In 2012 the multiple-award-winning theater director Michael Grandage created one of only a few operatic projects: a staging of Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* co-produced by HGO and the Glyndebourne Festival. Set in Franco’s Spain of the 1960s, the production was hailed for its beauty, with sets and costumes by award-winning designer Christopher Oram, and for affirming “Mozart’s comic masterpiece as both of its time and

perennially modern” (*Sunday Times*). HGO is delighted to bring this elegant staging to Houston under the direction of Ian Rutherford, who worked with Grandage and toured the production following its Glyndebourne run.

For this *Figaro*, HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers has assembled a cast of rising stars, starting with Glyndebourne’s 2013 *Figaro*, Czech baritone Adam Plachetka, and Count, HGO Studio alumnus Joshua Hopkins. *The Guardian* noted that “Plachetka’s passionate directness offsets...Hopkins’s manipulative suavity.”

Soprano Ailyn Pérez makes her professional role debut as the Countess, returning to HGO after a moving portrayal of Desdemona in last fall’s *Otello*, singing with “a velvet sheen” (*Houston Press*). In an unusual approach to Cherubino, the role will be sung by soprano Lauren Snouffer (rather than the usual mezzo-soprano), an HGO Studio alumna who gave a “resplendent” (*New York Times*) performance as Agnes in Tanglewood’s 2013 concert version of George Benjamin’s *Written on Skin*. This will be a professional role debut. Rising star Heidi Stober, also an HGO Studio alumna, will take the role of Susanna.

Harry Bicket, chief conductor of Santa Fe Opera and music director of The English Concert, will conduct.

***Eugene Onegin*: Houston first for classic Graham Vick production and house debut of Ekaterina Scherbachenko (October 30–November 13)**

Tchaikovsky’s beloved work based on the Pushkin verse novel receives elegant period treatment in this lavish theatrical production that Graham Vick (artistic director of Birmingham Opera) created for Glyndebourne. Wrote *The Independent*, “...the freshness and clear-sightedness of the vision continues to embody everything that is pure and classical and candid about Tchaikovsky’s musical response to Pushkin.” That vision will be realized by director Jacopo Spirei, associate director of Birmingham Opera, who assisted Vick at Glyndebourne.

As Tatyana, HGO presents the house debut of Russian soprano Ekaterina Scherbachenko, who sang the role at Glyndebourne in 2008; the following year she won the Cardiff Singer of the World competition. Studio alumnus Scott Hendricks, Sharpless in HGO’s *Madame Butterfly* this season, returns as Onegin. Norman Reinhardt, the versatile Studio alumnus who last season sang both Cassio in *Otello* and Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*, sings Lensky.

Michael Hofstetter, whose “artful” conducting of HGO’s 2011 *Fidelio* “captured the color and character of the music” (*Houston Chronicle*), will conduct.

***Tosca*: Reprise of “gripping” production (October 23–November 14)**

Puccini’s *Tosca* was one of three operas HGO presented during its second season in 1956–57, and the work continues to captivate Houston audiences. In 2010, HGO presented a new production that was hailed by the *Houston Chronicle*: “From the first chords that explode from the orchestra, Maestro Patrick Summers just about propelling himself out of the pit with them, a gripping sense of urgency drives Houston Grand Opera’s

potent new production.” Next season audiences can again experience the excitement of this *Tosca*, animated by new and returning stars and creative team.

Soprano Liudmyla Monastyrska, whose portrayal of Aida in her 2013 HGO debut was marked with “power, finesse, and soul” (*Houston Chronicle*) will sing the fiery Tosca. Siberian tenor Alexey Dolgov will reprise his Cavaradossi, sung at HGO in 2010 with “warm lyricism and...gallant presence” (*Houston Chronicle*). Polish baritone Andrzej Dobber, who has performed Scarpia at Semperoper Dresden, Berlin State Opera, and Deutsche Oper Berlin, will make his U.S. role debut with these HGO performances.

Canadian director John Caird (Lynn Wyatt Great Artist 2012–13, during which season he directed *La bohème* at HGO) returns for this revival, along with Maestro Summers in the pit.

***Carousel*: Rob Ashford’s new production features HGO debut of Stephanie Blythe, return of rising star Studio alums (April 22–May 7)**

HGO continues celebrating the great American musical with a production of Rodgers & Hammerstein’s beloved classic *Carousel*. Broadway sensation Rob Ashford, who seduced HGO audiences in 2014 with his theatrical, dance-rich *Carmen*, will direct this co-production with Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Singing Julie Jordan is Andrea Carroll, a 2014 alumna of the HGO Studio who gave a “lovely” portrayal (*Washington Post*) of Julie at Glimmerglass Opera in 2014. The carousel barker Billy Bigelow will be sung by Australian baritone Duncan Rock, an alumnus of English National Opera’s young artist program who will be making his HGO debut.

Soprano Lauren Snouffer, an HGO Studio alumna, makes a second appearance this season (Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro*) as Carrie Pipperidge, along with fellow Studio alumnus Norman Reinhardt (Lensky in *Eugene Onegin*, Cassio in HGO’s *Otello*, and Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*, both 2014). Both are rising stars.

Making her long-awaited HGO debut as Nettie Fowler is Stephanie Blythe, one of opera’s most beloved mezzo-sopranos. Also acclaimed for her tribute to Kate Smith’s interpretations of the Great American Songbook, Miss Blythe was seen in *Live from Lincoln Center*’s presentation of *Carousel* on PBS in 2013.

Carousel will be conducted by Richard Bado, who holds The Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair at HGO.

***O Columbia*: world premiere by Gregory Spears with libretto by Royce Vavrek (early fall 2015)**

O Columbia, a chamber opera in three acts by composer Gregory Spears and librettist Royce Vavrek, examines the past, present, and future of the American spirit of exploration. Each short act, framed by works for chorus, imagines a conversation that crosses space and time to create a unified story: we ride with Sir Walter Raleigh and a mysterious figure on the bow of his ship heading for the New World; sit with a teenager in her Houston bedroom as she experiences communion and later, heartbreak, with a Columbia Space Shuttle astronaut gliding around the earth; and finally we travel with three astronauts making a one-way journey to the far reaches of the solar system with Lady Columbia waiting at the edge. The work is a celebration of the identity of America’s frontier men and women, an ode to America’s national mythology. *O Columbia* is

informed by interviews with the NASA community, and will be presented under the auspices of HGOco, the company's community collaboration initiative.

Composer Gregory Spears previously wrote the score for HGOco's *The Bricklayer* in 2012; his opera *Paul's Case*, performed at Pittsburgh Opera, Urban Arias, and New York's 2014 Prototype Festival was described as having "blinding brilliance" (*New York Observer*). Librettist Royce Vavrek wrote the "playful, quick-witted" (*Wall Street Journal*) libretto to composer Ricky Ian Gordon's score for the opera *27*, which premiered at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis in June 2014.

O Columbia will be directed by Kevin Newbery, whose recent projects include *Kansas City Choir Boy* at the 2014 Prototype Festival and *Anna Bolena* at Lyric Opera of Chicago. The conductor will be Timothy Myers, who led HGO's world premiere of *A Coffin in Egypt* in March 2014 and serves as the artistic director and principal conductor of North Carolina Opera.

World premiere chamber opera by David Hanlon with libretto by Stephanie Fleischmann (May 2016)

As a massive hurricane hurtles towards the Gulf Coast, a Galvestonian who refuses to leave her home is haunted by storms past. An exploration of resilience, loss, and the power of place, composer David Hanlon's new opera mines the legacy of the Great Storm of 1900 and Hurricane Ike on the region, investigating how natural disasters reshape our psychic terrain. This work, also presented under the auspices of HGOco, is being informed by interviews with Galveston residents and is in development for premiere in May of 2016.

David Hanlon's 2013 HGOco-commissioned opera *Past the Checkpoints*, which he also conducted, was described in a *Houston Chronicle* column as "accessible, relevant, and important." In 2014 HGOco premiered his chamber vocal piece *The Ninth November I Was Hiding*. Playwright and librettist Stephanie Fleischmann has contributed libretti for the opera *The Long Walk*, which will premiere at Opera Saratoga in July 2015, and for the upcoming klezmer opera *The Property* for Lyric Opera of Chicago's Lyric Unlimited program. Director Matthew Ozawa directed HGO's 2014 hit production of *A Little Night Music*. The cast and further details will be announced at a later date.

Subscription tickets for HGO's 2015–16 are now available. For further information please visit HGO.org or call 713-228-OPERA (6737). Performances take place at the Wortham Theater Center, Texas Avenue, unless specifically stated otherwise.

About Houston Grand Opera

Since its inception in 1955, Houston Grand Opera has grown from a small regional organization into an internationally renowned opera company. HGO enjoys a reputation for commissioning and producing new works, including 56 world premieres and seven American premieres since 1973. In addition to producing and performing world-class opera, HGO contributes to the cultural enrichment of Houston and the nation through a diverse and innovative program of performances, community events, and education projects that reaches the widest possible public. HGO has toured extensively, including trips to Europe and Asia, and has

won a Tony, two Grammy awards, and two Emmy awards—the only opera company to have won all three honors.

Through HGOco, Houston Grand Opera creates opportunities for Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to observe, participate in, and create art. Its *Song of Houston* project is an ongoing initiative to create and share work based on stories that define the unique character of our city and its diverse communities. Since 2007, HGOco has commissioned 17 new works along with countless innovative community projects, reaching more than one million people in the greater Houston metropolitan area. The NEXUS initiative is HGO's multi-year ticket underwriting program that allows Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to enjoy world-class opera without the barrier of price. Since 2007, NEXUS has enabled more than 175,000 Houstonians to experience first-quality opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

Houston Grand Opera: 2015–16 Season

** HGO debut*

+ current or former HGO Studio artist

Puccini: Tosca

October 23, 25m, 31, November 3, 6, 14 (alt. cast), 2015

Conductor: Patrick Summers

Director: John Caird

Set & Costume Designer: Bunny Christie

Lighting Designer: Duane Schuler

Chorus Master: Richard Bado+

Floria Tosca: Liudmyla Monastyrska

Mario Cavaradossi: Alexey Dolgov

Scarpia: Andrzej Dobber*

A co-production of Houston Grand Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago

Tchaikovsky: Eugene Onegin

October 30, November 1m, 7, 10, 13, 2015

Conductor: Michael Hofstetter

Production: Graham Vick

Director: Jacopo Spirei

Set & Costume Designer: Richard Hudson

Lighting Designer: Matthew Richardson*

Choreographer: Ron Howell*

Chorus Master: Richard Bado+

Eugene Onegin: Scott Hendricks+

Tatyana: Ekaterina Scherbachenko*

Lensky: Norman Reinhardt+

Olga: TBA

Prince Gremin: Dmitry Belosselskiy

Production created by Glyndebourne Festival Opera

Rachel Portman/Nicholas Wright: The Little Prince

Based on the book by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

December 4, 6m, 9, 11, 13m, 16, 18, 19, 20m, 2015

Conductor: Bradley Moore

Production: Francesca Zambello

Director: Ellen Schlafer

Set & Costume Designer: Maria Bjørnson

Original Lighting Designer: Rick Fisher

Children's Chorus Director: Karen Reeves

The Little Prince: TBA

The Pilot: Joshua Hopkins+

*A co-production of Houston Grand Opera, Skylight Opera Theatre, Boston Lyric Opera and the Wang Center for the Performing Arts, and Tulsa Opera
Original production made possible by a challenge grant from The Edgar Foster Daniels Foundation
Commissioned through a generous gift of Kathryn and David Berg in memory of Larry Pfeffer
Le Petit Prince copyright Editions Gallimard, Paris 1946. Used by permission.*

Mozart: The Marriage of Figaro

January 22, 24m, 30, February 3, 5, 7m, 2016

Conductor: Harry Bicket*
Production: Michael Grandage
Director: Ian Rutherford
Set & Costume Designer: Christopher Oram
Lighting Designer: Paule Constable
Chorus Master: Richard Bado+
Figaro: Adam Plachetka*
Susanna: Heidi Stober+
Count Almaviva: Joshua Hopkins+
Countess Almaviva: Ailyn Pérez
Cherubino: Lauren Snouffer+
Marcellina: Catherine Cook
Doctor Bartolo: Peixin Chen+

A co-production of Houston Grand Opera and Glyndebourne Festival Opera

Dvořák: Rusalka

January 29, 31m, February 6, 9, 12, 2016

Conductor: Harry Bicket
Production: Melly Still*
Set & Costume Designer: Rae Smith*
Lighting Designer: Paule Constable
Movement Director: Rick Nodine*
Chorus Master: Richard Bado+
Rusalka: Ana María Martínez+
Prince: Brian Jagde*
Vodník, a water sprite: Richard Paul Fink+
Ježibaba, a witch: Jill Grove+
Foreign Princess: Maida Hundeling*

Production created by Glyndebourne Festival Opera

Carlisle Floyd: Prince of Players

Based on the play *Compleat Female Stage Beauty* by Jeffrey Hatcher

March 5, 11, 13m, 2016

Conductor: Patrick Summers
Director: Michael Gieleta*
Edward Kynaston: TBA
Margaret Hughes: TBA
Charles II: Chad Shelton+
Sir Charles Sedley: Joseph Evans
Villiers, Duke of Buckingham: Scott Quinn+

Commissioned by Houston Grand Opera

Wagner: Siegfried

April 16, 20, 23, 28, May 1m, 2016

Conductor: Patrick Summers
Production: La Fura dels Baus
Director: Carlus Padrissa
Set Designer: Roland Olbeter
Costume Designer: Chu Uroz
Lighting Designer: Peter van Praet

Projection Designer: Franc Aleu
Siegfried: Jay Hunter Morris
Wanderer: Iain Paterson
Brünnhilde: Christine Goerke
Mime: Rodell Rosel
Alberich: Christopher Purves
Erda: Meredith Arwady
Fafner: Andrea Silvestrelli

A co-production of Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia, Valencia, and Maggio Musicale, Florence

Richard Rodgers: Carousel
Book and Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II
April 22, 24m, 27, 29, 30, May 6, 7, 2016
Conductor: Richard Bado+
Director/Choreographer: Rob Ashford
Set Designer: Paolo Ventura*
Costume Designer: Catherine Zuber
Lighting Designer: Neil Austin
Chorus Master: Richard Bado+
Billy Bigelow: Duncan Rock*
Julie Jordan: Andrea Carroll+
Carrie Pipperidge: Lauren Snouffer+
Enoch Snow: Norman Reinhardt+
Nettie Fowler: Stephanie Blythe*

A co-production of Houston Grand Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago

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