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Houston Grand Opera Honors Veterans Day with Free Performance of *Veterans Songbook* Project

Veterans' stories brought to life in song at November 8 event

Houston, October 23, 2015—Houston Grand Opera's community collaboration and education initiative, HGOco, will present a full-length, public performance of music from the *Veterans Songbook* project on Sunday, November 8, at 7:30 p.m. at Christ Church Cathedral, to pay tribute to U.S. servicemen and servicewomen. This compelling project creates songs drawn directly from the stories of Houston-based veterans and their loved ones, with themes centered on conflict and courage as well as strength and sacrifice.

First launched in October 2014, the multi-year *Veterans Songbook* project began with a six-week workshop held in partnership with U.S. VETS and additional workshops with Multicultural Education and Counseling Through the Arts (MECA). Veterans of all ages, genders, and branches of the service were invited to share their stories. Houston-based composers commissioned by HGOco then wrote songs based on these interviews in order to emphasize significant—although sometimes silent—struggles that many veterans face once they return home from war, as well as their journeys toward healing.

The November 8 presentation of *Veterans Songbook* will feature collections of songs by composers Mark Buller and Mary Carol Warwick, performed by soprano Chabrelle Williams and baritone Wesley Landry, with Christopher Turbessi on piano. Spoken commentary by members of the Houston veterans community will complete the presentation and a public reception will immediately follow.

The performance is presented as part of "The End of War," a three-day symposium at Christ Church Cathedral featuring scholars, artists, and caregivers as they explore the implications of war and battle. Admission is free and guests are encouraged to pre-register online at christchurchcathedral.org/event/the-end-of-war/.

HGOco, in collaboration with U.S. VETS, Grace After Fire, and the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, will host additional veterans workshops in the fall of 2015 with interviews facilitated by artists from Writers in the Schools(WITS), local storytellers, and Houston-based composers. To participate in the fall workshops and to receive more information, please contact HGOco Programs Director Brittany Duncan at

sohstories@hgo.org or call 713-546-0211.

Since 2007, HGOco has commissioned 18 new works and three song cycles and has conducted innovative community projects reaching more than one million people in the greater Houston metropolitan area. HGOco creates opportunities for Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to observe, participate in, and create art. Through projects like *Veterans Songbook*, HGOco endeavors to make opera relevant to changing audiences by connecting HGO with the diverse Houston community through collaboration.

The *Veterans Songbook* project is part of the next chapter in the award-winning *Song of Houston* series, the ongoing initiative within HGOco that creates new works based on stories that define the unique character of Houston. Notable *Song of Houston* projects include the commission and recent world premiere of *O Columbia*, a chamber opera developed with Houston's space community; 2007's *The Refuge*, a groundbreaking musical tapestry of immigrant stories from various Houston communities; 2010's *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna / To Cross the Face of the Moon*, the world's first mariachi opera; and East + West (2010–14), a four-year series of eight chamber operas telling contemporary stories from Houston's Asian communities. In 2009 the program received the Leading Lights Diversity Award in Arts and Culture from the National MultiCultural Institute (NCMI).

Lead supporters of the Veterans Songbook include Bank of America, Conoco Phillips, Marathon Oil Corporation, and Occidental Petroleum.

Performance Details:

Veterans Songbook at Christ Church Cathedral

WHEN: Sunday, November 8, at 7:30 p.m.

WHERE: Christ Church Cathedral, 1117 Texas Avenue, Houston, TX 77002

ADMISSION: Free. Guests are encouraged to pre-register online at www.christchurchcathedral.org/event/the-end-of-war/

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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 57 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. 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 200,000 Houstonians to experience first-quality opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

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