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Houston Grand Opera Studio Artist Wins Major Prize and HGO Commission Nominated for International Award

Houston, March X, 2015—Houston Grand Opera (HGO) congratulates HGO Studio artist **Reginald Smith Jr.**, who is one of six winners of the prestigious [George London](#) Foundation Awards Competition. The award comes with a \$10,000 prize. Since 1971, the annual competition has given a total of more than \$2 million to an outstanding roster of young American and Canadian opera singers who have gone on to international stardom. The list of past winners includes Christine Brewer, Joyce DiDonato, Renée Fleming, Catherine Malfitano, James Morris, Matthew Polenzani, Sondra Radvanovsky, Neil Shicoff, and Dawn Upshaw. One of the oldest vocal competitions in the United States and Canada, the George London Foundation Awards Competition offers among the most substantial awards.

Baritone Reginald Smith Jr., of Atlanta, Georgia, is now in his second year at the HGO Studio, the company's highly respected young artist program, where he is the Mr. and Mrs. Harlan C. Stai, Terrell Tone Owen Memorial Endowed Fund at the Community Foundation of Abilene Endowed Fellow. His HGO performances include the Bonze in *Madame Butterfly*, the Speaker in student performances of *The Magic Flute*, Dancaire in *Carmen*, Marullo in *Rigoletto*, and Blind in *Die Fledermaus*. He performed the Bonze for Cincinnati Opera last summer; other appearances include the title role in *Falstaff*, Germont in *La traviata*, Jake in *Porgy and Bess*, Figaro and Antonio in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Capulet and the Duke in *Romeo and Juliet*, Dr. Falke in *Die Fledermaus*, and Colline in *La bohème*. He performs this season in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with Johnson City Symphony Orchestra, in a holiday pops concert with Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, and in Berlioz's *Romeo and Juliet* with the Boise Philharmonic. This summer, he will sing the Count in *The Marriage of Figaro* with Wolf Trap Opera.

HGO has also learned that the opera *A Christmas Carol*, commissioned by HGO and premiered in December 2014, is one of six finalists in the World Premieres category of the [International Opera Awards](#). The winners will be announced at a ceremony in London on April 26. The awards are presented annually by the Opera Awards Foundation, which is affiliated with *Opera* magazine. The international panel of judges includes editors and writers from the magazine.

A Christmas Carol launched Houston Grand Opera's new cycle of holiday-themed works, continuing the company's long tradition of creating and premiering important new operas. The score was written by rising English composer **Iain Bell**. Bell

based his recasting of Charles Dickens's festive favorite on the author's little-known performance adaptation: an eerie yet ultimately heartwarming one-man show in which a single narrator undertakes all the roles, from Scrooge to the three ghosts he encounters. The libretto is by actor, director, and author **Simon Callow**, winner of an Olivier Award for Best Direction and author of *Charles Dickens and the Great Theatre of the World*. Callow made his U.S. operatic directorial debut with this production. The set and costumes were by **Laura Hopkins**, and **Mark McCullough** was the lighting designer. A tour de force portrayal of The Narrator was given by American tenor **Jay Hunter Morris**, an enthusiastic proponent of new opera.

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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 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 cultures. Since 2007, HGOco has commissioned 16 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 superlative 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

60th Anniversary Concert

March 19, 2015

Cullen Theater, Wortham Theater Center

Joyce DiDonato, mezzo-soprano

Conductor: Patrick Summers

HGO Studio artists

HGO Orchestra

Tickets and Information: HGO.org / 713-228-6737

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