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60th ANNIVERSARY
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PRESS RELEASE

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Houston Grand Opera Sustains Growth in Season Offerings, Attendance, and Exceeds Fundraising Goal

Houston, June 2, 2015— Houston Grand Opera announced at its annual meeting today that its 2014–15 season sustained the increased attendance and fundraising levels achieved over the previous four years of consistent expansion. During its 60th anniversary season HGO presented eight main-stage productions, as it did in 2013–14, for a total of forty-eight performances. Attendance matched that of last season while the organization’s historic comprehensive campaign raised \$172.9 million, beating its \$165 million goal.

Houston Grand Opera Board Chair Dr. John Mendelsohn said, “We were thrilled to again be able to offer Houston a broad range and scale of high-quality programming on the main stage and in our community. The wonderful success of our campaign was a resounding vote of confidence in HGO’s role as a force for a stronger Houston.”

HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers said that this season the company “broadened the definition of the art form.” In addition to *Die Walküre*, the second installment of the company’s first *Ring* cycle, highlights included the world premiere of Iain Bell and Simon Callow’s holiday opera, *A Christmas Carol* (which was a finalist for an International Opera Award in the category of world premieres); and José “Pepe” Martínez and Leonard Foglia’s *El Pasado Nunca Se Termina/The Past Is Never Finished*, HGO’s second mariachi opera, “whose emotional directness touched the heart much like the greatest Italian operas.”

HGO Managing Director Perryn Leech observed, “Now, more than ever, people are hungry to discover meaning and beauty in their lives. HGO continues to serve Houston and the world with top quality presentations in a range of styles that generate excitement and global interest. Audiences came from 25 countries and 45 states, and our runs of *Die Walküre* and *The Magic Flute* played to over 100% capacity. We are delighted that more than half of our audience for *El Pasado* were first-time ticket buyers.”

Leech added, “As ever, it is a challenge to close out the year on a balanced budget, but we are striving to do so.”

Historic campaign exceeds goal

HGO’s first comprehensive fundraising campaign, *Inspiring Performance—The Campaign for Houston Grand Opera*, raised \$172.9 million against a goal of \$165 million by December 31, 2014. Co-chaired by Houston businessmen and HGO board members J. Scott Arnoldy, Chairman, President, and CEO of Triten Corporation and Albert Chao, President and CEO of

Westlake Chemical Corporation, the campaign raised \$124.2 million for operations, \$17.1 million for HGO's endowment, and \$31.6 million in legacy funding. 6,648 donors contributed to the campaign, 4,558 of whom were new donors.

Among the projects and priorities funded by the campaign are:

- 30 new main stage productions
- 17 world premieres, 1 American premiere
- The NEXUS initiative, which has funded more than 200,000 free or deeply discounted tickets and subscriptions since its inception in 2008
- Bringing Richard Wagner's epic *Ring* cycle to Houston for the first time
- Critically acclaimed performances of Mieczyslaw Weinberg's long-suppressed opera *The Passenger* in Houston and at New York's Park Avenue Armory as part of the Lincoln Center Festival
- The world's first mariachi opera, *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna/To Cross the Face of the Moon*

Noted Arnoldy, "The tremendous generosity of donors from Houston, the great state of Texas, and beyond has insured that Houston will have great opera for years to come and a brighter future as a great American city."

HGO's gala special events, regarded as highlights of Houston's social scene, raised more than \$2,800,000. A special 60th anniversary gala dinner and concert featuring superstar mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato capped a season of successes that included Opening Night, Concert of Arias, and *Opera Ball 2015: España*.

Main-stage audience remains at new highs, including new visitors, with increased subscription sales

HGO's attendance of 81,136 at main-stage productions virtually matched that of the 2013–14 season, which had shown a 3% increase over the previous year and a 28% increase over the 2009–10 season. Total sales represented 93% of capacity. Subscription sales in 2014–15 exceeded the previous year by 2%, and single ticket sales were even with the previous year.

In addition to the sold-out runs of *Die Walküre* and *The Magic Flute*, two of the three performances of *El Pasado Nunca Se Termina/The Past Is Never Finished*, were sold out. First-time buyers made up 52% of the *El Pasado* audience. One-third of the audience had come to see the first mariachi opera, *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna/To Cross the Face of the Moon*, in 2011 or 2013, and returned to HGO for the second.

Community programs explore new ground

HGOco, HGO's community collaboration initiative, engaged more than 70,000 Houstonians through a variety of commissions, partnerships, and arts education programs. The flagship Song of Houston program opened a new chapter of engaging larger Houston communities by exploring contemporary Houston life and the city's workforce. A new song cycle celebrating the centennial of the Houston Ship Channel was based on interviews with tug boat operators, fishermen, and other workers. Veteran's Songbook, a multi-year project, began showcasing the stories of Houston's veteran community, the largest in the U.S. HGOco also began development of two new chamber operas to be premiered in 2015–16, on the subjects of exploration, including the space program, and the impact of hurricanes in the Houston region.

HGO presented main-stage performances of *The Magic Flute* for the Student Performance Series—two student matinees and High School Night. Opera to Go!, a touring opera program for new and young audiences, presented *Cinderella in Spain* and *The Pastry Prince* in schools and other venues across the region.

For many of the more than 6000 students who came to the Wortham Center for the Student Performance Series, it was their first exposure to opera. A Sugarland Middle School student reacted, “Walking through the doors almost froze me in awe. It only got better as the curtains began to rise. Everything on stage was astounding, amazing, and mind-blowing.”

Said HGO Committee Chair Cynthia Petrello, “The responses we have received from our Houston community are a powerful endorsement that our work adds meaning to people’s lives through the collaborative effort of telling their stories through words and music. We are proud that our approach of partnering with communities has become a model for performing arts practice across the nation.”

Nurturing and training young talent

The HGO Studio continued to fulfill its mission as one of the nation’s leading training programs for outstanding operatic talent. Six new artists joined the program, for a total of 11. In addition to appearances on the HGO stage, artists performed in community venues and at major competitions. Current Studio artist Reginald Smith Jr. won several major competitions, including the Metropolitan Opera National Council. Former Studio artists continue to make appearances at major houses; five made their Metropolitan Opera debuts during one four-week period last December, and mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton received one of opera’s prestigious prizes, the Richard Tucker Award.

Free and low-cost access to opera continues

HGO’s 2013–14 Miller Outdoor Theatre production, *The Magic Flute*, played to a combined audience of 11,000 on May 22 and 23, and the company was delighted to return to The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion in The Woodlands for the third consecutive season.

The performances at Miller Outdoor Theatre—free to the public—are made possible through HGO’s unique NEXUS initiative. Underwritten by leading donors, NEXUS has made it possible for HGO to share opera with families, children, students, and seniors during the last eight seasons. The program enables the company to perform for free in venues like Miller Outdoor Theatre and to sell deeply discounted tickets for just \$15 at select Wortham Theater Center offerings. Since NEXUS was launched in 2007, more than 200,000 discounted or free NEXUS tickets have been sold or distributed.

“We are incredibly grateful to our partners, corporate and foundation supporters, and individual donors who have helped to make HGO’s 60th anniversary season a spectacular one for opera in Houston and our region,” said Leech. “The loyalty and generosity of our subscribers and this city’s wonderful spirit make it possible for us to aim high and succeed.”

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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.

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