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## Houston Grand Opera Presents Landmark Return of *Nixon in China* (January 20–28) and Verdi's *Requiem* (February 10–18)

*Two Game-Changing Masterpieces Open HGO's Winter Season*

Houston, December 21, 2016—In the fall of 1987, Houston Grand Opera's world premiere of *Nixon in China* made political headlines and galvanized the opera world. Thirty years later, John Adams's trailblazing opera returns in a new-to-Houston production that sheds light on the electronic media's role in political history, just as a new media-savvy American president takes office.

A dramatization of President Richard Nixon's historic 1972 visit to China that ended decades of isolation from the West, John Adams's first opera, with a libretto by Alice Goodman and staging by Peter Sellars, broke new ground with its visceral portrayal of relatively recent world events and its bold departures in musical style and instrumentation. The Houston production was televised on PBS's *Great Performances* and recorded the same year; the broadcast won an Emmy Award and the recording won a Grammy in 1988. Since then, *Nixon in China* has been produced worldwide and has become one of the most performed among operas of our time.

Composer John Adams wrote, in his 2008 memoir, *Hallelujah Junction*, "Nixon and Mao virtually embodied the 20<sup>th</sup> century's great agonistic struggle for human happiness: capitalism versus communism; the market economy versus the social welfare state. The lead characters were so vivid they literally cried out for operatic treatment...."

In 2004, director **James Robinson** created a new production for the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis that takes a more intimate approach than the original staging, including incorporating previously classified 8 mm home movies filmed by the delegation that accompanied Nixon to China. HGO celebrates the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the work's

historic world premiere by presenting this reinterpretation, directed by Robinson, who will also direct HGO's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* in the spring of 2017.

"Nixon's visit was the biggest TV event after JFK's funeral," says Robinson. "Every aspect was choreographed to hit prime time in the U.S.; it pre-empted everyone's favorite shows. We decided to look at it as a journey that was all about media, about getting your time on TV."

Leading the cast in the title role will be baritone and HGO Studio alumnus **Scott Hendricks**, whose "sonorous voice" was noted by the *Houston Chronicle* in his 2015 portrayal of Sharpless in HGO's *Madame Butterfly*. Pat Nixon will be played by Canadian soprano **Andriana Chuchman**, whose 2014 last-minute replacement of Anna Netrebko in the Metropolitan Opera's *The Elixir of Love* was deemed "an assured, sparkling success" by the *New York Times*. This appearance will mark her HGO debut. Chinese baritone **Chen-Ye Yuan**, an HGO Studio alumnus who sang the Speaker of the Temple in HGO's 2008 *The Magic Flute*, and who makes his home in China, will play the role of the premier, Chou En-lai. Tenor and HGO Studio alumnus **Chad Shelton** and bass-baritone **Patrick Carfizzi**, both frequently seen on HGO's main stage, will portray Mao Tse-tung and Henry Kissinger, respectively. Shelton most recently performed Charles II in the world premiere of Carlisle Floyd's *Prince of Players*, and Carfizzi sang Dr. Dulcamara in *The Elixir of Love* earlier this season. The demanding coloratura role of Chiang Ch'ing (Madame Mao) will be sung by Canadian soprano **Tracy Dahl**, who has performed the role with Opera Colorado, Portland Opera, and Vancouver Opera. She last appeared at HGO as Zerbinetta in *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1993).

Conductor **Robert Spano**, music director of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and the Aspen Music Festival and an active proponent of contemporary composers, will be on the podium. He most recently conducted *The Magic Flute* at HGO in 2015.

Widely recognized as one of the most dramatic works written in the form of the Christian liturgy, **Verdi's mighty Requiem** differs from those of other composers in that it demands operatic performing forces; it has been called "an opera in disguise."

The work premiered in 1874 at Milan's Church of San Marco with four operatic soloists and the composer on the podium. The occasion was the anniversary of the death of Italian poet and national hero Alessandro Manzoni, to whom Verdi dedicated the work. Subsequent performances often took place in opera houses, and from the beginning, critics remarked, some disapprovingly, on the work's operatic nature. What has never been questioned is the Requiem's profound spiritual, even cathartic impact, which has caused it to be performed under the most trying of circumstances, such as in a World War II concentration camp, and excerpted on such occasions as the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, and in New York City after the 9/11 tragedy.

Houston welcomes the Super Bowl in February 2017, and the surrounding logistics have created challenges to the presentation of fully staged opera at the Wortham Theater Center during that period. HGO is delighted to take this opportunity to devote the company's full operatic forces to Verdi's iconic score, including the HGO Orchestra led by Artistic & Music Director **Patrick Summers** and the largest HGO Chorus in the company's history, directed by HGO's highly respected chorus master, **Richard Bado**, along with four outstanding soloists, February 10–18.

**Angela Meade**, whose Norma at the Metropolitan Opera created a critical stir, will make her HGO debut as the soprano soloist. At her Requiem performance at the BBC Proms, her voice was “all gilded evanescence and glow” (*The Arts Desk*). **Sasha Cooke**—Magnolia Hawks in HGO’s 2013 *Show Boat* and noted by the *Los Angeles Times* for her “standout” performance as Anna in San Francisco Opera’s 2015 *Les Troyens*—will be the alto soloist. The tenor soloist will be **Alexey Dolgov**, a hit with Houston audiences in 2015 as both Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly* and Cavaradossi in *Tosca*. The bass soloist will be **Peixin Chen**, a 2015 HGO Studio alumnus who sang Dr. Bartolo in HGO’s *The Marriage of Figaro* last season and performed Sparafucile in *Rigoletto* at Santa Fe Opera (2015).

In the spring, Maestro Summers will lead *Götterdämmerung*, the final installment of Wagner’s epic *Ring* cycle, featuring a new generation of leading Wagnerians including **Simon O’Neill** as Siegfried and **Christine Goerke** as Brünnhilde, starting April 22. Mozart’s zany yet deeply emotive comedy, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*—featuring Russian coloratura soprano and HGO Studio alumna **Albina Shagimuratova** as Konstanze and leading American tenor **Lawrence Brownlee** as Belmonte in HGO’s inventive 2002 co-production—will close the main-stage season, beginning April 28. HGO will also present the world premiere, in March, of *Some Light Emerges* by composer **Laura Kaminsky** with libretto by **Mark Campbell** and **Kimberly Reed**. Inspired by the creation of Houston’s iconic Rothko Chapel by philanthropist and art collector Dominique de Menil, the work is commissioned by HGOco, the company’s community collaboration and education initiative. In May, HGOco will present *Das Barbecü*, a comedic country-western take on Wagner’s *Ring* by **Scott Warrender** and **Jim Luigs**.

The full list of events for the rest of the HGO season is provided below. More information is available at [HGO.org](http://HGO.org).

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## Houston Grand Opera: 2016–17 Season

\* *Company debut*

\*\* *HGO Studio artist*

# *Former HGO Studio artist*

### John Adams/Alice Goodman: *Nixon in China*

Sung in English with projected English text

January 20, 22m, 24, 26, 28, 2017

Richard Nixon	Scott Hendricks #
Pat Nixon	Andriana Chuchman *
Chou En-lai	Chen-Ye Yuan #
Mao Tse-tung	Chad Shelton #
Henry Kissinger	Patrick Carfizzi
Chiang Ch’ing	Tracy Dahl
Nancy T’ang (First Secretary)	Yelena Dyachek **
Second Secretary	Megan Mikailovna Samarin **
Third Secretary	Zoie Reams **
Conductor	Robert Spano
Director	James Robinson
Set Designer	Allen Moyer
Costume Designer	James Schuette
Lighting Designer	Paul Palazzo

Projection Designer Wendall K. Harrington  
Choreographer Seán Curran  
Sound Designer Brian Mohr \*  
Chorus Master Richard Bado #  
Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus

*A co-production of Houston Grand Opera and  
Opera Theatre of Saint Louis*

### **Verdi: Requiem**

Sung in Latin with projected English translation

**February 10, 12m, 15, 17, 18, 2017**

Soprano Angela Meade \*  
Alto Sasha Cooke  
Tenor Alexey Dolgov  
Bass Peixin Chen #  
Conductor Patrick Summers  
Chorus Master Richard Bado #  
Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus

### **Wagner: Götterdämmerung**

Sung in German with projected English translation

**April 22, 25, 29, May 4, 7m, 2017**

Siegfried Simon O'Neill  
Brünnhilde Christine Goerke  
Hagen Andrea Silvestrelli  
Gunther Ryan McKinny #  
Waltraute/Second Norn Jamie Barton #  
Alberich Christopher Purves  
First Norn Meredith Arwady  
Third Norn/Gutrune Heidi Melton \*  
Conductor Patrick Summers  
Production La Fura dels Baus  
Director Carlus Padrissa  
Set Designer Roland Olbeter  
Costume Designer Chu Oroz  
Lighting Designer Peter van Praet  
Projection Designer Franc Aleu  
Chorus Master Richard Bado #  
Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus

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

## **Mozart: The Abduction from the Seraglio**

Sung in German with projected English translation

**April 28, 30m, May 6, 10, 12, 2017**

Konstanze	Albina Shagimuratova #
Belmonte	Lawrence Brownlee
Osmin	Ryan Speedo Green *
Blonde	Uliana Alexyuk #
Pedrillo	Chris Bozeka **
Pasha Selim	Christopher Purves
Conductor	Thomas Rösner
Director	James Robinson
Set Designer	Allen Moyer
Costume Designer	Anna R. Oliver
Lighting Designer	Paul Palazzo
Projection Designer	Wendell K. Harrington
Chorus Master	Richard Bado #

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus

*A Houston Grand Opera production*

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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 62 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 225,000 Houstonians to experience first-quality opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

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