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 20th 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 30th 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 mainstage 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.

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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 Mikhailovna 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 Art 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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