
Houston Grand Opera Appoints Carleen Graham as Director of HGOco

Houston, June 14, 2016— Houston Grand Opera (HGO) has appointed Carleen Graham, an award-winning opera educator, administrator, researcher, and stage director, as director of the company’s community collaboration and education initiative, HGOco. She will assume the position August 22. The executive search process was guided by [Arts Consulting Group](#).

“In the short time since its formation HGOco has established a national reputation for creatively collaborating with Houston’s diverse communities and engaging young people with opera,” noted HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers and Managing Director Perryn Leech. “Carleen Graham’s expertise and energy as an innovative educator, administrator, and practitioner of opera will enable her to build on the legacy of Founding Director Sandra Bernhard as HGOco moves into its second decade. Her wide experience makes her the perfect person to develop programs and partnerships that will serve Houston and the opera field in innovative and exciting ways.”

Added Judy Agee, chair of the company’s HGOco committee, “Carleen Graham impressed us all with her passion for opera and for communicating with new audiences. We are looking forward to her leadership in helping us forge broader and deeper connections with Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds.”

“The opportunity to join this prestigious American opera company is an exciting privilege,” said Graham. “I look forward to working with the HGOco team, the HGO family, and the wonderfully diverse communities, schools, and organizations of Houston in continuing HGOco’s rich tradition of community engagement through the art of storytelling with words and music.”

A distinguished teaching professor at the State University of New York at Potsdam where she has been on the faculty since 1991, Graham has taught courses including Teaching Opera to Children and Opera, Research, and Advocacy. She has been recognized by the university with its President’s and Chancellor’s awards for excellence in teaching. As director of the university’s Crane Opera Ensemble, she was instrumental in establishing and administering the Dominic J. Pellicciotti Opera Composition Prize for new works that explore themes related to tolerance, inclusion, and celebration of diversity. She also oversaw a program that enables regional schoolchildren to attend campus performances and engage in interactive workshops with college students. Graham is a former director of the university’s Center for Undergraduate Research (2009–13), which promotes undergraduate research across the curriculum and fosters inquiry-based student learning. She has led

forums for Opera America and the National Opera Association on new developments in community engagement and education.

In 2012 Graham co-founded, with Artistic Director Stephanie Blythe, the week-long Fall Island Vocal Arts Seminar for emerging singers and pianists, engaging them in working with art songs by living American composers. As a stage director, she has directed numerous professional and college opera productions, including recent stints at Hawaii Performing Arts Festival and Tri-Cities Opera.

Carleen Graham earned a bachelor of music degree from Ohio University, a master of music degree and graduate diploma in vocal performance from the New England Conservatory of Music, and a doctor of education degree in music and music education from Teachers College, Columbia University.

About HGOco

Established in 2007, HGOco, HGO's community collaboration and education initiative, has reached 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, endeavoring to make opera relevant to its changing audiences by connecting the company with the diverse and changing Houston community through creative collaboration. In the 2015–16 season the department touched more than 67,500 Houstonians through commissioned works, partnerships, and arts education programs. The flagship *Song of Houston* program expanded connections with larger Houston communities by exploring contemporary Houston life and the city's workforce. Two chamber operas—*O Columbia* (Gregory Spears and Royce Vavrek), developed with input from the NASA community, and *After the Storm* (David Hanlon and Stephanie Fleischmann), which dramatized the impact of hurricanes on Gulf Coast residents—brought opera to new audiences across the region. In addition, *What Wings They Were: The Case of Emeline* (John L. Cornelius II and Janine Joseph), a chamber opera based on a true 19th-century Houston court case involving a free African American woman unjustly enslaved, was premiered in partnership with two Houston theaters and performed for students across the city. *Veterans Songbook*, a multi-year project, continued showcasing the stories of Houston's veteran community, the largest in the United States. HGOco's founding director, Sandra Bernhard, died of cancer in the fall of 2015.

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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 61 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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