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Asia Society Texas Center to Host Panel on Race and Representation in Houston Performing Arts, March 31

Panel to include representatives from Houston Grand Opera, Organization of Chinese Americans, Rice University, University of Houston

Houston, March 16, 2017— **Asia Society Texas Center** will host ***Representation and 21st Century Responsibilities in the Performing Arts***, a free panel discussion and public forum in collaboration with **Houston Grand Opera (HGO)** on **Friday, March 31, at 7 p.m.**, at the Center, **1370 Southmore Blvd., Houston**. If Houston is the most racially diverse cosmopolitan area in the country and its current demographics reflect the future composition of most of America's cities, what is the arts community's responsibility to reflect and own this 21st century reality? As part of an ongoing national discussion about race and representation recently reignited by HGO's January 2017 production of the opera *Nixon in China*, the panel will use the lens of Asian and Asian American identity to surface ideas of representation, voice, and creative interpretation. Seating will be limited. To RSVP, visit <http://asiasociety.org/texas/events/representation-and-21st-century-responsibilities-performing-arts>. The conversation will be livestreamed via HowlRoundTV (<http://howlround.com/tv>)

The panel will be moderated by **Sixto Wagan**, director of the Center for Art & Social Engagement, University of Houston. The panelists will be:

Pia Agrawal – Program Director, Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts, University of Houston

Shih-Hui Chen – Chair, Music Composition and Theory, Shepherd School of Music, Rice University

Ryan Speedo Green – bass-baritone, performing in HGO’s upcoming opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio*

Patrick Summers – Artistic and Music Director, Houston Grand Opera

Steven Wu – Festival Co-Director, Houston Asian American Pacific Islander (HAAPI) Film Festival, Organization of Chinese Americans

Among the questions to be addressed are: When is cultural heritage open to interpretation or utilization in metaphor? What are whitewashing and yellowface? In what ways do creative license and practical realities in artistic decision making conflict with concerns of cultural appropriation? How can arts organizations provide historical and creative context that addresses their multiple publics? What is the role of critique in this conversation? How do Houston’s arts leaders respond to an increasingly vocal community that demands fair representation?

About the Panelists

Pia Agrawal joined the University of Houston’s Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts as program director in August 2014 where she ensures the success of the Center’s public programming including the Mitchell Artist Lecture, the annual CounterCurrent festival, and the Center’s artist residencies. Prior to her work at the Mitchell Center, she served as the managing director of the Rude Mechs (Austin, TX) and as programming director of FringeArts (Philadelphia, PA).

Shih-Hui Chen is Professor of Music and chair of the music composition department at the Shepherd School of Music, Rice University where she also chairs the Syzygy New Music concert series. Recent projects include *A Plea to Lady Chang’e* for chamber orchestra and nanguan pipa; *Fantasia on the Theme of Guanglingsan* for zheng and Chinese orchestra; three new orchestral works for the Shepherd School Symphony Orchestra, Pacific Rim Music Festival, and National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra; and *Messages From a Paiwan Village*, a 50-minute storytelling musical drama. Seeking a deeper understanding of her native culture and music, Shih-Hui Chen spent two years (2010, 2012) at Academia Sinica in Taiwan studying indigenous and Nanguan music as a Senior Fulbright Scholar. Dr. Chen was the founder and director of the 2015 *Common Practice 21C: Classical, Contemporary, and Cross-Culture Music*, bringing together more than thirty musicians from six countries including Taiwan, China, and Southeast Asia to a three-day music festival at Rice University and Asia Society Texas Center. She recently completed the 2016 Nanguan festival and tour, which presented a mixture of traditional Nanguan and newly composed works influenced by Nanguan. Dr. Chen has received awards and commissions from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Koussevitzky Foundation in the Library of Congress, Guggenheim Foundation, Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Studies at Harvard University, and the American Academy in Rome. Her compositions have been performed widely by orchestras throughout the U.S. and abroad including the Philadelphia Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, and Utah Symphony. Chen’s work has also been the subject of analysis by scholars such as German ethnomusicologist Barbara Mittler, who wrote Chen’s biographical entry in the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians.

Ryan Speedo Green, bass-baritone, is making his HGO and role debut as Osmin in *The Abduction of the Seraglio* in April. This season he also returns to the Metropolitan Opera as Colline in the iconic Zeffirelli production of *La bohème* and joins the Vienna State Opera for his third season as an ensemble member, with roles including Basilio in *The Barber of Seville* and Timur in *Turandot*, among others. In the fall of 2016, Little, Brown and Co. published *Sing for Your Life* by *New York Times* journalist Daniel Bergner; the book tells the story of Green's personal and artistic journey from a trailer park in southeastern Virginia and from time spent in Virginia's juvenile facility of last resort to the Metropolitan Opera stage. An alumnus of the Met's Lindemann Young Artist Program, Green has performed a number of roles at the Met, including the Mandarin in *Turandot*, Rambo in the Met premiere of *The Death of Klinghoffer* conducted by David Robertson, the Second Knight in a new production of *Parsifal* that was broadcast as part of the Met's *Live in HD* program, the Bonze in *Madama Butterfly*, and the Jailer in *Tosca* (also broadcast in *Live in HD*).

Patrick Summers was named artistic and music director of HGO in 2011 after having served as the company's music director since 1998. He has conducted more than 60 operas at HGO and has been responsible for many important artistic advances, including the development of the HGO Orchestra. Some highlights of his work at HGO include conducting the company's first-ever complete cycle of Wagner's *Ring*; collaborating on the world premieres of André Previn's *Brief Encounter*, Christopher Theofanidis's *The Refuge*, Jake Heggie's *It's a Wonderful Life*, *The End of the Affair*, and *Three Decembers*, Carlisle Floyd's *Cold Sassy Tree* and *Prince of Players*, and Tod Machover's *Resurrection*; leading the American premiere of Weinberg's Holocaust opera *The Passenger* at HGO and on tour to the Lincoln Center Festival; and nurturing the careers of such artists as Christine Goerke, Ailyn Pérez, Joyce DiDonato, Ana María Martínez, Ryan McKinny, Tamara Wilson, Albina Shagimuratova, Anthony Roth Costanzo, Norman Reinhardt, Jamie Barton, and Dimitri Pittas. Maestro Summers is principal guest conductor for San Francisco Opera (SFO), where he was honored in 2015 with that company's highest honor, the San Francisco Opera Medal.

Steven Wu is Festival Co-Director of the Houston Asian American Pacific Islander (HAAPI) Film Festival hosted by OCA Greater Houston (OCAGH). Steven first joined OCAGH as a volunteer for the HAAPI Film Festival when he moved to Houston from Atlanta, but soon discovered love for the cause to take on a larger role and begin new initiatives for the festival (Local Shorts Competition, Student Film Competition, Filmmaker Workshops). Steven also cofounded and currently leads the TEA (Together Empowering All) Talks program in OCAGH to facilitate community discussions on issues that affect the AAPI community and promote solidarity among all of our unique groups in Houston. While a chemical engineer by degree and traveler at heart, Steven's true passions lie in advancing the equality of AAPI's and minorities through the power of media and discussion.

About the Moderator

Sixto Wagan is the inaugural director for the Center for Arts & Social Engagement at the University of Houston. Prior to this role, he led DiverseWorks Artspace as artistic director, co-

executive director and performing arts curator. During his tenure, he nurtured artists, communities and emerging arts organizations through commissions and place-based initiatives. Wagan is known for collaborating with performers whose works tackle prescient cultural, social, and political issues. He currently serves on the board of Dance Source Houston, The M.A.T.C.H. (Midtown Arts and Theater Complex Houston), and the board of trustees of Dance/USA. He served as a Hub Site for the National Dance Project, and on the boards of the National Performance Network and The MacDowell Colony. He has been recognized with two awards in Houston for Dance Presenting. Wagan has been part of the Performing Arts Japan Advisory Committee, French – US Exchange for Dance (FUSED) initiative, Dance Down Under Ambassadors, the National Performance Network’s US/Japan Connection, the Contemporary Art Centers consortium and the Performing Americas Project; and has served on panels for a number of foundations including the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Joan Mitchell Foundation, ArtPlace America, US Artists and MAP Fund; and government entities and partnerships including the National Endowment for the Arts, Texas Commission on the Arts, and the Houston Arts Alliance. Wagan has spoken at and facilitated panels on equity and diversity at national and regional convenings hosted by Americans for the Arts, Western Arts Alliance, and other national/regional organizations.

About Asia Society Texas Center

With 12 locations throughout the world, Asia Society is the leading educational organization promoting mutual understanding and strengthening partnerships among the peoples, leaders, and institutions of Asia and the west. Asia Society Texas Center executes the global mission with a local focus, enriching and engaging the vast diversity of Houston through innovative, relevant programs in arts and culture, business and policy, education, and community outreach.

www.AsiaSociety.org/Texas

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, collaborative community activities, 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 create, participate in, and observe 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.