Houston Grand Opera Presents Göttterdammerung (April 22–May 7) and The Abduction from the Seraglio (April 28–May 12)

Spring repertory showcases spectacular final installment of Wagner Ring cycle and Mozart comic masterpiece

Houston, March 7, 2017—Houston Grand Opera presents Göttterdammerung (Twilight of the Gods), 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 company’s mainstage season, beginning April 28.

HGO’s four-year mounting of Wagner’s epic cycle reaches its thunderous climax this season with Göttterdammerung in the dazzling La Fura dels Baus staging, directed by Carlus Padrissa. The heroic Siegfried gives Brünnhilde the ring as a token of their love, but they unexpectedly face challenges beyond their control. In the definitive act of self-sacrifice, Brünnhilde returns the universe to its natural order. The Rhine overflows, Valhalla burns, and the kingdom of the gods is destroyed.

New Zealand tenor Simon O’Neill takes on the role of Siegfried with “a sound to give one real hope for the healthy future of [Wagnerian] singing” (International Record Review). Superstar soprano Christine Goerke returns as Brünnhilde; of her portrayal in HGO’s Die Walküre in 2015, Opera News wrote, “beyond the power and warmth of her voice, Goerke’s vigorous performance radiated brash confidence.” Italian bass Andrea Silvestrelli, who sang Fafner in Das Rheingold and Siegfried, returns as Hagen, and bass-baritone and HGO Studio alumnus Ryan McKinny, who performed Donner in Das Rheingold, portrays Gunther. Award-winning mezzo-soprano and HGO Studio...
alumna Jamie Barton, whom the New York Times terms “a leader of a new generation of opera stars,” returns as Waltraute/Second Norn after singing Fricka in Das Rheingold and in Die Walküre. Reprising his role as Alberich will be English bass-baritone Christopher Purves, who will also play Pasha Selim in HGO’s concurrent production of The Abduction from the Seraglio. Contralto Meredith Arwady, who portrayed Erda in Das Rheingold, will sing First Norn. Soprano Heidi Melton will sing Third Norn/Gutrune. HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers conducts.

Set designer for HGO’s Ring operas is Roland Olbeter; costume designer is Chu Uroz. Peter van Praet is lighting designer, and projection designer is Franc Aleu.

HGO brings back Mozart’s comic singspiel The Abduction from the Seraglio in the widely admired staging by James Robinson that the company premiered in 2002 and last presented in 2008. A damsel in distress and her maidservant are captured by Turkish pirates and await their fate in the harem of the Pasha Selim. Her fiancé and his valet set out to rescue their beloveds as the colorful comedy unfolds. The updating of the Middle Eastern–flavored action from Istanbul to the decadent railcars of the 1920s Orient Express was deemed by Opera News “inventive…a dramatic refocusing that puts Mozart’s wonderfully emotive arias into high relief…also looked wonderful, in Allen Moyer’s cleverly designed sets.”

The demanding dramatic coloratura role of Konstanze will be performed by Russian soprano and HGO Studio alumna Albina Shagimuratova, who last appeared at HGO as Violetta in La traviata (2012). Of her 2016 Metropolitan Opera performance as Konstanze, the New York Times wrote, “The virtuosic runs, leaps and trills of Konstanze’s arias held no terrors for Ms. Shagimuratova. She offered a memorable and fiery rendition of ‘Martern Aller Arten,’ a ferociously difficult showstopper that also requires delicate balancing with the orchestral part.”

Tenor Lawrence Brownlee, acclaimed as part of a “new golden age of bel canto” (New York Times), will sing Belmonte. A regular performer at HGO, he last portrayed Lindoro in HGO’s 2012 The Italian Girl in Algiers. Making his HGO debut as Osmín will be bass-baritone Ryan Speedo Green, noted by the New York Times as “excellent as Osmín…a scene-stealing baritone with a robust voice.” Ukrainian soprano and HGO Studio alumna Uliana Alexyuk returns to the company as Blonde. Her 2014 last-minute portrayal of Gilda in Rigoletto “captured Gilda’s sweetness, ardor, and vulnerability” (Houston Chronicle). The role of Pedrillo will be sung by HGO Studio artist Chris Bozeka, who performed Nemorino in performances of The Elixir of Love earlier this season.

Austrian conductor Thomas Rösner, who led HGO’s 2013 Die Fledermaus, will be in the pit. James Robinson returns to direct. Costumes are by Anna R. Oliver, lighting by Paul Palazzo, and projection design by Wendall K. Harrington.

To mark the close of HGO’s historic first Ring cycle, the company will present Scott Warrender and Jim Luigs’s Das Barbecü on April 23 and 30. A fast-paced comedic retelling of the Ring epic set in Wild West Texas, the production will be performed in two iconic Houston locales, Jackson Street BBQ and Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon. 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

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 Wendall K. Harrington
Chorus Master Richard Bado #
Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus
A Houston Grand Opera production

Das Barbecú
Music by Scott Warrender/Book & Lyrics by Jim Luigs
Presented by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc.

Sunday, April 23, at Jackson Street Barbecue, 209 Jackson St.
Sunday, April 30, at Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon, 11410 Hempstead Rd.
Cast TBA
Director Mitchell Greco *
Musical Director Patrick Harvey #
Technical Director Kyle Coyer
Properties Design Director Megan
Costume Designer Clair Hummel

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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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