



HoustonGrandOpera

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Houston Grand Opera presents Bernstein's *West Side Story* (April 20–May 6), Bellini's *Norma* (April 27–May 11), and return of *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* (May 17, 19, 20) at HGO Resilience Theater

World's first mariachi opera returns after New York triumph

Houston, January 29, 2018— Houston Grand Opera (HGO) will present the first major American opera house production of **Leonard Bernstein's** landmark musical *West Side Story*, April 20–May 6, and Bellini's vocal powerhouse *Norma*, April 27–May 11, in the HGO Resilience Theater at the George R. Brown Convention Center. HGO will also bring back its popular groundbreaking production of the world's first mariachi opera, *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna/To Cross the Face of the Moon*, for three special performances on May 17, 19, and 20, also in Resilience Theater. Composed by **José "Pepe" Martínez** with libretto by **Leonard Foglia**, the powerful story chronicling three generations of a family divided by countries and cultures has been performed to audience and critical acclaim all over the United States, in Paris, and in Mexico. It received rave reviews at its New York premiere at New York City Opera. Tickets for these productions at the HGO Resilience Theater in the George R. Brown Convention Center are available at HGO.org. Parking is available at the Avenida North Garage located at 1815 Rusk

Street, across from Resilience Theater. A sky bridge connects the parking garage to the GRB, and there is clear signage directing patrons to the theater. More information about parking can be found [here](#).

“HGO has long taken the lead in expanding the definition of opera since our award-winning 1976 production of *Porgy and Bess*. In 2010, we broke new ground with the commission of the world’s first mariachi opera, *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*, and now we do the same with the first major American operatic performances of *West Side Story*,” notes **HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers**. “We are thrilled to offer these extraordinary works to Houston audiences in tandem with *Norma*, one of the masterpieces of the bel canto opera tradition.”

“HGO’s ability to present our entire 2017–18 season at the GRB has been possible because of an amazing collaboration with Houston First,” notes **HGO Managing Director Perryn Leech**. “Our colleagues there arranged to relocate more than 60 events in order to accommodate all of our productions. And we are pleased that the theater we built there will now also be used by other arts organizations such as Houston Ballet.”

***West Side Story*: Francesca Zambello directs first major American opera house presentation of Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, and Jerome Robbins’s beloved musical, featuring soprano Andrea Carroll and tenor Norman Reinhardt (April 20–May 6, 2018)**

Arts organizations around the world are celebrating the 2018 centennial of Leonard Bernstein’s birth with performances of his music. The now-classic story of two young lovers, divided by battling gangs in the harsh streets of New York City’s West Side, broke the mold of musical theater forever and has found its way into opera houses across Europe, including a production at Austria’s Bregenz Festival in 2003 and 2004 directed by Francesca Zambello. Yet *West Side Story* has never been mounted by a major American opera company. Now Zambello returns to HGO, where she staged many notable projects including *Show Boat* (2013), *Billy Budd* (2009), and the world premieres of *The Little Prince* (2003) and *Florencia en el Amazonas* (1996), to create a new production that frames the racially charged story within the beautiful diversity of 21st-century America, while preserving the passion, drama, and heart-stopping dancing.

Set in a factory where the young women in the story are employed, the production will feature as Maria HGO Studio alumna Andrea Carroll, whose Houston successes include portrayals of Mary Hatch Bailey in the world premiere of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer’s *It’s a Wonderful Life* and Julie Jordan in *Carousel* (both in 2016). HGO Studio alumnus Norman Reinhardt will reprise the role of Tony after singing it in the 2016 Salzburg Festival opposite Cecilia Bartoli. Reinhardt’s portrayal of Lensky in HGO’s 2015 *Eugene Onegin* was “magnificently sung” (*Houston Press*). Baritone **Brian Vu** will make his role and house debuts as Riff. A 2016–17 resident artist with Pittsburgh Opera, he won first place in the 2016 Lotte Lenya Competition, whose judges noted his “refreshing flair and vocal prowess.”

Timothy Myers, artistic and music director of North Carolina Opera, will conduct. He led HGO's productions of Gregory Spears and Royce Vavrek's *O Columbia* (2015) and Ricky Ian Gordon and Leonard Foglia's *A Coffin in Egypt* (2014).

***Norma*: Acclaimed soprano Liudmyla Monastyrska and mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton headline Kevin Newbury production of Bellini's bel canto masterwork (April 27–May 11, 2018), a part of the *Seeking the Human Spirit* initiative**

Returning to HGO after 22 years, *Norma*, the summit of the bel canto opera tradition, is a reworking of the Euripidean tragedy *Medea*. A high priestess caught in a spiritual crisis makes the ultimate sacrifice after being scorned by the father of her children. Vocal acrobatics abound, with melodies ranging from the stunningly serene "Casta diva" to the fury of fireworks that explode as Norma's rage overflows, so Ukrainian soprano Liudmyla Monastyrska's first performances in the role will be particularly significant. After thrilling Houston audiences as *Aida* in 2013 and *Tosca* in 2015, she recently gave a "vocally scorching" (*Telegraph*) portrayal of Abigaille in *Nabucco* at London's Royal Opera, Covent Garden. Joining her as Adalgisa is world-renowned mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton, an HGO Studio alumna whose debut as Fenena in that same Covent Garden production was impressive with "warmth, richness of tone, [and] convincing dramatic engagement" (*Opera*). Tenor and HGO Studio alumnus **Chad Shelton**, who sang with "vibrant, stentorian tones" (*Texas Classical Review*) as Chairman Mao in last season's revival of *Nixon in China*, will sing Pollione, and bass and HGO Studio alumnus Peixin Chen will portray Oroveso. Inspired by research into Druid culture in Roman-occupied Gaul, acclaimed director Kevin Newbury's staging of this monumental work captures the visceral nature of the characters, with costumes often described as reminiscent of *Game of Thrones*.

***Cruzar la Cara de la Luna/To Cross the Face of the Moon*: HGO's internationally acclaimed mariachi opera of love, loss, and the immigrant experience returns to Houston (May 17, 19, 20)**

Where is home? Is it where we are born? Or where we live most of our lives? Is it with the family we leave behind or with the new ones we create? *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna/To Cross the Face of the Moon*, by José "Pepe" Martínez and Leonard Foglia, follows three generations of a single family, divided by countries and cultures. Premiered by HGO in 2010 and remounted in 2013, the opera was the world's first composed for mariachi. Recorded on CD by HGO in 2011, it has since toured cities in the United States as well as Paris, France. After its New York City Opera premiere on January 25, 2018, the *New York Times* wrote, "few involved in the current New York run could have imagined the extent to which these issues would be roiling American politics and society at this very moment... The subject is explored with affecting sensitivity in this rich, honest opera."

In *Cruzar*, a Mexican-American man questions his own place in the world as he straddles two cultures: his immigrant father's and his own as a first-generation American. As he faces his father's imminent death and long-buried secrets are revealed, he finds himself dramatically re-evaluating his own

understanding of what makes a family. Set against a vibrant mariachi score, the story of three generations shifts between the past and the present, Mexico and Texas, Spanish and English.

HGO's May performances will feature three artists who created their roles in the 2010 premiere: baritone and HGO Studio alumnus **Octavio Moreno** as Laurentino, mezzo-soprano **Cecilia Duarte** as Renata, and mezzo-soprano **Vanessa Alonzo** as Lupita. Baritone **Efraín Solís** will portray Mark, tenor **Daniel Montenegro** will sing Rafael, and and singer **Miguel de Aranda** will sing Chucho. Actor **Miguel Nuñez** will play Victor. This production will also feature the musicians of Los Angeles-based **Mariachi Los Camperos** and will be conducted by **David Hanlon**. Leonard Foglia will direct and choreography will be by **Keturah Stickann**. The lighting realizer and technical supervisor is **Gary Echelmeyer**.

The late **José “Pepe” Martínez** was born in Tecalitlán, Jalisco, Mexico, and joined his first mariachi band as a violinist at the age of 12. He began writing music when he was 19 years old, and in 1966 formed his own mariachi ensemble, Mariachi Nuevo Tecalitlán. In 1975, he joined Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, and his work with that ensemble established him as a composer and arranger. “Somos Novios” and “El Cascabel” are two of the first songs Martínez arranged for his new group; original works such as “Violín Huapango,” “Lluvia de cuerdas,” “Mexicanísimo,” and “Viva Veracruz” with its rapid violin ricochets—a Martínez signature—followed. He was the music director of Mariachi Vargas from 1975 until he stepped down after the 2013–14 season. *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*, commissioned by Houston Grand Opera and premiered in 2010, was his first opera. He later composed *El Pasado Nunca Se Termina* with librettist Leonard Foglia, which premiered at the Lyric Opera of Chicago and was staged at HGO in 2015. He died on April 23, 2016.

Leonard Foglia has directed the world premieres and subsequent stagings of *Moby-Dick* (Dallas Opera, San Francisco Opera, where it was filmed for PBS), *Everest* (Dallas Opera); *Cold Mountain* (Santa Fe Opera); *A Coffin in Egypt* (HGO); *The End of the Affair* (HGO); *Three Decembers* (HGO); and *It's a Wonderful Life* (HGO). His production of *Dead Man Walking* was produced by New York City Opera and has been seen across the United States as well as Teatro Real in Madrid. For Broadway, he directed *Master Class*, *Wait Until Dark*, *Thurgood* (filmed for HBO), *The People in the Picture*, *On Golden Pond*, and *The Gin Game*. Off-Broadway credits include Anna Deavere Smith's *Notes from the Field* (filmed for HBO) and *Let Me Down Easy* (filmed for PBS), *One Touch of Venus* at Encores!, *The Stendhal Syndrome*, and *If Memory Serves*. As a librettist, he wrote (and directed) *El Pasado Nunca Se Termina/The Past Is Never Finished*, with composer José “Pepe” Martínez, which premiered at Lyric Opera of Chicago; *A Coffin in Egypt* with composer Ricky Ian Gordon, which premiered at HGO; and *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna/To Cross the Face of the Moon* with composer Martínez, which premiered at HGO and has played across the country as well as Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris.

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Production details

* *Company debut*

** *HGO Studio artist*

Former HGO Studio artist

West Side Story

Based on a Conception of **JEROME ROBBINS**

Book by **ARTHUR LAURENTS**, Music by **LEONARD BERNSTEIN**, Lyrics by **STEPHEN SONDHEIM**

Entire Original Production Directed and Choreographed by **JEROME ROBBINS**

Sung in English with projected text

April 20, 22m, 28, May 1, 3, 4, 6m, 2018

Maria	Andrea Carroll #
Tony	Norman Reinhardt #
Anita	TBD #
Riff	Brian Vu *
Conductor	Timothy Myers
Director	Francesca Zambello
Choreographer	Julio Monge *
Set Designer	Peter J. Davison
Costume Designer	Jessica Jahn
Lighting Designer	Mark McCullough
Associate Director	Eric Sean Fogel
Houston Grand Opera Orchestra	

A co-production of Houston Grand Opera, Glimmerglass Festival, and Lyric Opera of Chicago

Bellini: Norma

Sung in Italian with projected English translation

April 27, 29m, May 5, 8, 11, 2018

Norma	Liudmyla Monastyrska
Adalgisa	Jamie Barton #
Pollione	Chad Shelton #
Oroveso	Peixin Chen #
Conductor	Patrick Summers
Director	Kevin Newbury
Set Designer	David Korins *
Costume Designer	Jessica Jahn
Lighting Designer	Duane Schuler
Chorus Master	Richard Bado #
Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus	

A co-production of San Francisco Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Gran Teatre del Liceu

**Cruzar la Cara de la Luna/
 To Cross the Face of the Moon**
Musica por / Music by José “Pepe” Martínez
Letras por / Lyrics by José “Pepe” Martínez and Leonard Foglia
Libro por / Book by Leonard Foglia
 Sung in English and Spanish with projected text/translation
May 17, 19, 20

Laurentino	Octavio Moreno #
Renata	Cecilia Duarte
Mark	Efraín Solís
Diana	TBD
Rafael	Daniel Montenegro
Lupita	Vanessa Alonzo
Chucho	Miguel de Aranda
Victor	Miguel Nuñez
Music Director/Conductor	David Hanlon
Director	Leonard Foglia
Associate Director/ Choreographer	Keturah Stickann
Lighting Realizer/ Technical Supervisor	Gary Echelmeyer
Sound Designer	Andrew Harper
Mariachi Los Camperos Director, Mariachi Los Camperos	Jesus Guzman

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About Houston Grand Opera

Houston Grand Opera (HGO) is one of the largest, most innovative, and most highly acclaimed opera companies in the United States. HGO was the only American finalist for Opera Company of the Year at the 2017 International Opera Awards. In fulfilling its mission to advance the operatic art to serve an ever-evolving audience, HGO has led the field in commissioning new works (64 world premieres to date) and in training and nurturing promising young artists and administrators. The company 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’s pioneering community engagement initiative, HGOco, has served as a model for other arts organizations.

The NEXUS Initiative is HGO’s multi-year ticket underwriting program that allows Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to enjoy opera without the barrier of price. Since 2007, NEXUS has enabled more than 250,000 Houstonians to experience superlative opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

HGO has toured extensively and has won a Tony, two Grammy awards, and two Emmy awards. It is the only opera company to win all three honors.

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