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Houston Grand Opera to Receive \$75,000 Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts

Funding is for West Side Story, which runs April 20–May 6

Houston, February 7, 2018—National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Jane Chu has approved more than \$25 million in grants as part of the NEA’s first major funding announcement for fiscal year 2018. Included in this announcement is an Art Works grant of \$75,000 to Houston Grand Opera for support of HGO’s mainstage presentation of *West Side Story*, which will be performed April 20–May 6 at the HGO Resilience Theater at the George R. Brown Convention Center. The first major American opera house presentation of **Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, and Jerome Robbins’s** beloved musical, the new production will be directed **Francesca Zambello** and will feature soprano **Andrea Carroll** and tenor **Norman Reinhardt**.

The Art Works category is the NEA’s largest funding category and supports projects that focus on the creation of art that meets the highest standards of excellence, public engagement with diverse and excellent art, lifelong learning in the arts, and/or the strengthening of communities through the arts.

“It is energizing to see the impact that the arts are making throughout the United States. These NEA-supported projects, such as this one to Houston Grand Opera, are good examples of how the arts build stronger and more vibrant communities, improve well-being, prepare our children to succeed, and increase the quality of our lives,” said NEA Chairman Chu. “At the National Endowment for the Arts, we believe that all people should have access to the joy, opportunities and connections the arts bring.”

“Houston Grand Opera was the first American opera company to make a commitment to nurture American work,” notes **HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers**. “We take great pride in continuing this tradition and celebrating the centennial of Leonard Bernstein by bringing a 21st-century view of this groundbreaking work of American genius to our main stage.”

“NEA grants carry tremendous significance because they reward the highest standards of excellence and community engagement,” adds **HGO Managing Director Perryn Leech**. “*West Side Story* is as relevant today as when it debuted on Broadway some 60 years ago, given our current climate of racial and class divides. HGO hopes that the new production will spark conversations that help to bridge these divides, as well as engage a wide audience.”

The multiple award-winning *West Side Story* 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, whose long association with HGO includes *Show Boat* (2013), *Billy Budd* (1998), and the world premieres of *The Little Prince* (2003) and *Florencia en el Amazonas* (1996). Now Zambello returns to HGO to create a new co-production with Glimmerglass Festival, where she is the artistic director, and Lyric Opera of Chicago. Set in a factory where the young women are employed, the production will feature as Maria HGO Studio alumna Andrea Carroll, whose HGO successes include portrayals of Mary Hatch Bailey in the 2016 world premiere of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer’s *It’s a Wonderful Life* and Julie Jordan in *Carousel* (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** will conduct. He led HGO’s productions of Gregory Spears and Royce Vavrek’s *O Columbia* (2015) and Ricky Ian Gordon’s *A Coffin in Egypt* (2014). **Julio Monge**, an original cast member of *Jerome Robbins’ Broadway*, choreographs.

For more information on projects included in the NEA grant announcement, visit [arts.gov/news](https://www.arts.gov/news).

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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 (65 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 three Emmy awards. It is the only opera company to win all three honors.

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