



SCHOOL'S COLLABORATION WITH OPERA AND MINECRAFT GAMING TECHNOLOGY IMPROVES COLLEGE READINESS

Houston, April 15, 2015— Houston Grand Opera (HGO) and Cristo Rey Jesuit College Preparatory School of Houston are giving underserved high school students a chance to shine through an innovative collaboration that coincides with HGO's presentation of Wagner's epic *Ring* operas.

More than 200 Cristo Rey freshmen and sophomores have been creating special projects that focus on the central themes of power and creativity that drive the Wagner masterpieces. The projects include designing video games using Gamestar Mechanic (developed by E-Line Media and design communities on a MinecraftEdu platform), along with writing projects, video, photography, and other art work. Students also had the opportunity to experience some of this year's opera, *Die Walküre*, as it was rehearsed onstage at the Wortham Theater Center earlier this month.

HGO has engaged consultants from Writers in the Schools and from Histrionix Learning Company, along with professional videographers, musicians, and composers to help develop the innovative curriculum and work with it in the classroom.

The gaming program is making a difference for some students. "The students are working in teams to solve problems, an essential college skill," says Computer Arts teacher Lupe Mendez. "Students who have been struggling can shine, and grades are improving."

Sandra Bernhard is director of HGOco, HGO's community collaboration initiative. "Opera is about telling stories through words and music, but everyone has different entry points," she notes. "Our goal in building this curriculum with Cristo Rey was to offer students multiple ways to experience these great themes and to create their own connections to them."

HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers points out, "There is a reason that these great operas have been enthralling people for over a century: not only is the music glorious, but the stories focus on needs and desires that drive all humans. Young people can relate to the passions in the *Ring* when they understand this universality."

Adds Cristo Rey Jesuit President Paul Posoli, “This is a tremendous learning opportunity for our students. We are thrilled that Houston Grand Opera has been such a committed and creative partner every step of the way.”

HGO’s Cristo Rey partnership is generously funded by the Kinder Foundation.

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 56 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. Its *Song of Houston* project is an ongoing initiative to create and share work based on stories that define the unique character of our city and its diverse cultures. Since 2007, HGOco has commissioned sixteen new works along with countless innovative community projects, reaching more than one million people in the greater Houston metropolitan area. 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 200,000 Houstonians to experience first-quality opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

Cristo Rey Jesuit College Preparatory School of Houston

Founded in 2009, Cristo Rey Jesuit is the only school of its kind in the state of Texas, providing a rigorous college prep education to students from economically challenged circumstances. The students earn their tuition by working one day per week at Fortune 500 and blue chip companies throughout Houston. The school's work-study program has been lauded around the country. Cristo Rey Jesuit has just recently achieved 100% college/university placement for its seniors, who are set to earn nearly seven million dollars in scholarships. The class of 2015 is Cristo Rey Jesuit's third graduating class. All three have had 100% of seniors accepted into college.

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