

Houston Grand Opera's 2020–21 Season Features Incredible Lineup of Seven Productions, Including Opera Favorites and Company Premieres

*The company presents the world premiere, **The Snowy Day**; two HGO premieres, **Breaking the Waves** and **The Sound of Music**; **Werther**, for the first time in over 40 years; the return of **Parsifal**; and two opera favorites, **Carmen** and **Cinderella***

HOUSTON—January 16, 2020—**Houston Grand Opera** (HGO) is proud to announce its 2020–21 season, featuring a repertoire of beloved classics, company premieres, and a much-anticipated world premiere. The 66th season opens with audience favorite *Carmen*. American mezzo-soprano **Isabel Leonard** makes her HGO and role debut as Carmen in the revival of **Rob Ashford's** acclaimed 2014 production of Bizet's classic. She is joined by tenor **Andrea Caré** as Don José, bass-baritone **Christian Pursell** as Escamillo, and **Anita Hartig** as Micaela, all making their HGO debuts. The production will be conducted by HGO Principal Guest Conductor **Eun Sun Kim**.

Following *Carmen* in the fall is Massenet's introspective masterpiece *Werther*. HGO Studio alumni **Arturo Chacón-Cruz** in the title role, **Ana María Martínez** as Charlotte, and **Joshua Hopkins** as Albert reunite for this work that has not been performed at Houston Grand Opera in over 40 years. Artistic and Music Director **Patrick Summers** conducts this production by **Francisco Negrin**.

The company's 71st world premiere continues the holiday opera series with **Joel Thompson**, composer, and **Andrea Davis Pinkney's**, librettist, opera adaptation of *The Snowy Day*, based on the beloved children's picture book by **Ezra Jack Keats**. The retelling of the iconic story of Peter, a little boy waking up to a snow day in New York City, will have audiences reminiscing about childhood wonder. Soprano **Julia Bullock** will make her HGO debut as Peter. **Omer Ben Seadia** also makes her HGO mainstage directorial debut, and Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers conducts this beloved childhood story.

The winter repertoire features the powerful Wagner drama *Parsifal*, and Donizetti's whimsical *Cinderella*. **Russell Thomas**, who makes his HGO and role debut as Radames in *Aida* in the 2019–20 season, also makes a role debut as the title character in *Parsifal*. He is joined by the incomparable **Christine Goerke** as Kundry, last seen at HGO in her triumphant performance as the title character in *Elektra* in 2018. HGO Studio alumnus **Ryan McKinny** as Amfortas, **Kwangchul Youn** making his HGO debut as Gurnemanz, and **Andrea Silvestrelli** as Klingsor complete the Knights of the Grail. Artistic and Music Director **Patrick Summers** conducts this epic saga.

In a revival of HGO's acclaimed 2007 production of *Cinderella* directed by Joan Font, mezzo-soprano **Emily D'Angelo** makes her role debut as Angelina alongside tenor **Jack Swanson** as Prince Ramiro and baritone **Sean Michael Plumb** as Dandini. Music Director of Opera Philadelphia **Corrado Rovaris** conducts. All four artists make their HGO debuts in the production.

HGO closes the season with two company premieres, **Missy Mazzoli** and **Royce Vavrek's** *Breaking the Waves* and the classic musical *The Sound of Music* by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. *Breaking the Waves*, based on the 1996 Lars von Trier award-winning film of the same name, is a co-production with Opera Ventures, Scottish Opera, Adelaide Festival, and Théâtre national de l'Opéra Comique. Premiering at the Edinburgh Festival in 2019, the production received rave reviews. Leading the HGO cast is HGO Studio alumna **Lauren Snouffer** in the role of tragic heroine, Bess. She is joined by **Alexander Birch Elliott** as her husband Jan, **Michelle Bradley** as her mother, and **Zoie Reams** as her sister-in-law Dodo. The production is led by director **Tom Morris**, whose acclaimed production of *War*

Horse had long runs at the National Theatre in London and on Broadway. **Nicole Paiement** conducts the HGO premiere in her company debut.

The Sound of Music will conclude the season with eight performances plus two student matinees. In her HGO debut, **Jeanine De Bique** sings the role of the musically inspired novice turned governess, Maria, and **Michael Mayes** as Captain von Trapp returns to HGO after an acclaimed run in the 2019–20 season's *Rigoletto*. Soprano **Katie Van Kooten** performs as the Mother Abbess. HGO's Chorus Master **Richard Bado** conducts, **Francesca Zambello** directs, and **Eric Sean Fogel** choreographs and serves as associate director for this classic piece of musical theater.

HGO is excited to announce **Isabel Leonard** as this season's Lynn Wyatt Great Artist recipient. The Lynn Wyatt Great Artist Fund is an endowed fund dedicated to bringing the world's best artists to HGO and was established in 2010 by Oscar Wyatt in honor of Lynn Wyatt's many years of philanthropy and service to the company. Past recipients include Ana María Martínez, Eun Sun Kim, John Caird, Anthony Roth Costanzo, Jane Glover, and Joyce DiDonato.

"I couldn't be more excited for next season, a year filled with voices that I absolutely adore. Rarely in our history have the two operas we perform in each of our three repertory periods talked to each other as dynamically as they do this coming season. Faith and its consequences are an exciting thread through the year, and an inquisitive audience member is given a perfect opportunity to explore the range of what opera can say to the 21st century," says Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers. "The two centerpieces of the season are undoubtedly Wagner's massive *Parsifal*, one of the greatest works ever conceived for a live medium, and *The Snowy Day*, a delightful and moving new opera from a phenomenally gifted young composer just emerging into his creative life. The dreams for this season have been large, and I'm overwhelmingly grateful to be realizing them and bringing them to our amazing public. Dive in!"

"Season announcements are a wonderfully exciting time for any company as we get to share amazing upcoming projects, that are often years in the planning, with our supporters. This upcoming season is a presentation of beloved opera classics and exciting premieres, complete with renowned singers familiar to Houston audiences as well as new faces that we will welcome to the Wortham for the first time. An extraordinary range of programming on all scales ensures that there really is something for everyone this season," says Managing Director Perryn Leech.

"From our mainstage season to our *Seeking the Human Spirit* and HGOco programs, our plans for next season will continue to deepen our relationship with our diverse and vibrant community through attendance and collaboration," continues Leech. "We are especially proud that through our Pay Your Age and NEXUS programs we can continue our commitment to welcoming Houston's young audiences and making opportunities to come to the opera affordable to all."

Four mainstage operas—*Carmen*, *The Snowy Day*, *Parsifal*, and *Breaking the Waves*—are part of *Seeking the Human Spirit*, HGO's six-year multidisciplinary initiative designed to highlight the universal spiritual themes raised in opera and to enable a wider segment of the Houston community to experience opera's beauty, emotional power, and potential to heal. The initiative, which began in the fall of 2017, includes at least three mainstage operas each season, one of which is a new work, united by a single theme. The theme of the 2020–21 season will be "**faith**."

To date, over 30 partner organizations have joined HGO's *Seeking the Human Spirit* initiative, with a commitment to create programs and events that provide context to the operas by enhancing and enriching our community's experience of the themes. Information about the 2020–2021 collaborations will be announced in spring 2020, and details can be found at HGO.org/STHS. In addition to the mainstage performances, HGO will present its 69th world premiere, *Songs for Murdered Sisters*, a song cycle with music by **Jake Heggie** and original poems by **Margaret Atwood**. The project was conceived by and will be performed by baritone **Joshua Hopkins** with the composer at the piano. The premiere will take place at the Rothko Chapel on September 10, 2020.

HGOco is Houston Grand Opera's celebrated initiative connecting the company to the community with over 320 creative, civic, and learning events reaching nearly 80,000 Houstonians annually. HGOco commissions new chamber works that tell stories relevant to Houston or highlight important educational themes. During the 2020–2021 season, HGO's 70th world premiere is the HGOco-commissioned *Katie: The Strongest of the Strong*. The opera is about strongwoman and immigrant Katie Sandwina, who toured with P.T. Barnum before becoming a suffragette and business owner. Composed by **Faye Chiao** to a libretto by **Anton Dudley**, this 45-minute, action-packed Opera to Go! production will tour schools and community venues from September 2020 through May 2021.

In March 2021, HGOco will present HGO's 72nd world premiere, *Turn and Burn, A Rodeo Opera*. Part of the *Song of Houston* initiative, the 75-minute chamber opera is composed by **Nell Shaw Cohen** to a libretto by **Megan Cohen**. The production will be directed by **Leslie Swackhamer**. The story, created from interviews with rodeo athletes and generous access courtesy of the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo, centers on a small-town barrel-racing champion and an ambitious young executive who aim for a big win at the rodeo. Set in a colorful world of bucking broncs and carnival rides, the premiere offers a feminist perspective on contemporary rodeo culture.

This season, HGO continues to encourage younger audiences to experience the art form through several opportunities, including its popular Opening Nights for Young Professionals (ONYP) subscription series. Subscriptions start as low as \$100 for seven operas and include exclusive season extras. In addition to ONYP, HGO offers two affordable ticket initiatives: Pay Your Age program and NEXUS ticket-underwriting program. Launched just five years ago, the Pay Your Age program gives those 24 and under the opportunity to pay the price of their age for a single ticket. The multiyear NEXUS initiative provides a limited number of \$15 tickets for first-time operagoers and student groups to all HGO performances. Both the ONYP subscription series and the affordable ticket initiatives have made opera more accessible to new audiences in the greater Houston area and beyond.

HGO's mainstage season will comprise **47 performances** (including three free community performances) of seven productions. The company will also present four student performances. Subscriptions to the 2020–21 season are now available at [HGO.org](https://www.hgo.org). Single tickets will be available later this summer. Additional details of the upcoming Houston Grand Opera productions are provided below, and more information is available at the company's website: [HGO.org](https://www.hgo.org). All repertoire, dates, pricing, productions, and casting are subject to change without notice.

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 in the 2019 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 (67 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 multiyear 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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Houston Grand Opera: 2020–21 Season

* *Company debut*

** *HGO Studio artist*

Former HGO Studio artist

† *Alternate cast*

Bizet: *Carmen*

October 23, 25m, 31, November 4, 6, 8m (alt.), 11 (High School Night - alt.), and 13 (alt.), 2020
Sung in French with projected English translations

CAST

Carmen: Isabel Leonard (US) *

Carolyn Sproule (CAN)# †

Don José: Andrea Caré (IT) *

Frederick Ballentine (US)* †

Escamillo: Christian Pursell (US)*

Micaela: Anita Hartig (ROMANIA)*

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Eun Sun Kim (KOREA)

Director/Choreographer: Rob Ashford (US)

Set Designer: David Rockwell (US)

Original Costume Designer: Julie Weiss (US)

Lighting Designer: Donald Holder (US)

Chorus Master: Richard Bado, Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair #

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra, Chorus, and Children's Chorus

A co-production with Lyric Opera of Chicago

Production funders:

Margaret Alkek Williams

ConocoPhillips

Massenet: *Werther*

October 30, November 1m, 7, 10, and 15m, 2020

Sung in French with projected English translations

CAST

Werther: Arturo Chacón-Cruz (MEX)#

Charlotte: Ana María Martínez (PR-US)#

Albert: Joshua Hopkins (CAN)#

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Patrick Summers, Margaret Alkek Williams Chair

Director: Francisco Negrin (SPAIN-US)

Set & Costume Designer: Louis Desiré (FR)

Lighting Designer: Duane Schuler (US)

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Children's Chorus

A production of San Francisco Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago

Thompson | Pinkney: *The Snowy Day*

World Premiere

Based on *The Snowy Day*, a book by Ezra Jack Keats

December 10, 11, 12, 13m, 15, 17 (alt.), 18, 19, and, 20m, 2020

Sung in English with projected English text

CAST

Peter: Julia Bullock (US)*

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Patrick Summers, Margaret Alkek Williams Chair (US-HGO)

Composer: Joel Thompson (US)*

Librettist Andrea Davis Pinkney (US)*

Director: Omer Ben Seadia (ISRAEL)

Set Designer: Amy Rubin (US)*

Costume Designer: Jessica Jahn (US)

Lighting Designer: Michael James Clark (US)

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra

Production funders:

The Cullen Foundation

The Robert and Janice McNair Foundation

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Robin Angly and Miles Smith

Sara and Bill Morgan

Rini and Edward Ziegler

Wagner: *Parsifal*

January 22, 27, 30, February 4, and 7m, 2021

Sung in German with projected English translations

CAST

Parsifal : Russell Thomas (US)

Kundry : Christine Goerke (US)

Amfortas : Ryan McKinny (US)#

Gurnemanz : Kwangchul Youn (Korea)*

Klingsor: Andrea Silvestrelli (US)

Titirel : André Courville (US)*

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Patrick Summers, Margaret Alkek Williams Chair (US)

Director: John Caird (UK)

Original Set and Costume Designer: Johan Engels (SOUTH AFRICA)

Lighting Designer: Duane Schuler (US)

Choreographer: Tim Claydon (UK)

Chorus Master: Richard Bado, Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair #

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus

A production of San Francisco Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago

Production funders:

Janice Barrow

Drs. Liz Grimm and Jack Roth

Donna Kaplan and Richard Lydecker

Dian and Harlan Stai

Mr. John G. Turner and Mr. Jerry G. Fischer

Rossini: *Cinderella*

January 29, 31m, February 6, 9, and 12, 2021

Sung in Italian with projected English translations

CAST

Angelina: Emily D'Angelo (CA)*

Prince Ramiro: Jack Swanson (US)*

Dandini: Sean Michael Plumb (US)*
Don Magnifico: Patrick Carfizzi (US)
Alidoro: André Courville (US)

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Corrado Rovaris (US)*
Director: Joan Font (SP)
Set and Costume Designer: Joan Guillén (SP)
Lighting Designer: Albert Faura (SP)
Choreographer / Associate Director: Xevi Dorca (SP)
Chorus Master: Richard Bado, Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair #

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus

Co-production with Welsh National Opera, Gran Teatre del Liceu, and Grand Théâtre de Genève

Production funders:

Vinson and Elkins LLP

Mazzoli|Vavrek: *Breaking the Waves*

April 16, 18m, 24, 29, and May 1, 2021

Sung in English with projected English text

CAST

Bess: Lauren Snouffer (US)#
Jan: Alexander Elliott (US)
Mother: Michelle Bradley (US)*
Dodo: Zoie Reams (US)#
Dr. Richardson: Nicholas Phan (US)#

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Nicole Paiement (CAN)*
Director: Tom Morris (UK)*
Set and Costume Designer: Soutra Gilmour (UK)*
Lighting Designer: Richard Howell (UK)*
Projection Designer: Will Duke (UK)*
Sound Designer: Jon Nicholls (UK)*
Chorus Master: Richard Bado, Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair #

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus

A co-production with Opera Ventures in association with Bristol Old Vic

Production funders:

Drs. Liz Grimm and Jack Roth

Sara and Gabriel Loperena

Rodgers | Hammerstein: *The Sound of Music*

April 30, May 2m, 4, 7, 8, 9m, 11m (10am student mat.), 12m (10am student mat.), 14, and 15, 2021

Sung in English with projected English text

CAST

Maria Reiner: Jeanine De Bique (TRINIDAD)*

Captain Georg von Trapp: Michael Mayes (US)

The Mother Abbess: Katie Van Kooten (US)

Max Detweiler: Daniel Belcher (US)#

Elsa Schraeder: Megan Marino (US)*

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Richard Bado, Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair #

Director: Francesca Zambello (US)

Set Designer: Peter Davison (UK)

Costume Designer: Aleš Valášek (CZECH)*

Lighting Designer: Mark McCullough (US)

Choreographer / Associate Director: Eric Sean Fogel (US)

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus

A co-production with Glimmerglass Opera Theater, Inc.

Production funders:

Margaret Alkek Williams

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