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Editor
Laura Chandler

Designer
Rachel Block

Contributors
Laura Chandler
Jeremy Johnson
Perryn Leech
Jim Townsend

Advertising
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## CONTENTS

### FEATURES

#### 20 HGO in the Community
Don't miss HGOco's exciting and thought-provoking *Seeking the Human Spirit* community events.

#### 22 Two Decades of Leadership
Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers marks 20 years of accomplishment at HGO and beyond.

#### 25 A Singer's Journey on the Amazon
It's been an exciting ride for *Florencia en el Amazonas* star Ana María Martínez.

#### 31 Behind *The Pearl Fishers*
A cross-cultural panel looks at Bizet's 19th-century opera in the light of the 21st century.

#### 61 On the Road with Opera to Go!
A day in the life of HGO's family-friendly touring company.

### DEPARTMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Welcome from Patrick Summers and Perryn Leech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Production Funders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>News and Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Catán: <em>Florencia en el Amazonas</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Bizet: <em>The Pearl Fishers</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td><em>Florencia en el Amazonas</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Who’s Who: <em>Florencia en el Amazonas</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td><em>The Pearl Fishers</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Who’s Who: <em>The Pearl Fishers</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Unsung Heroes: Denise Simon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>HGOco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>HGO Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Special Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Spotlight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Impresarios Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>HGO Donors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Opera Lingo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>Calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>Up Next</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>Your HGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Out of Character: Roderick Cox</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cover design by Rachel Block**

**Right: A scene from *The Pearl Fishers*. Photo by Todd Rosenberg.**
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Welcome!

Our winter repertoire comprises two operas that are among the most lush and gorgeous in the repertoire. If you thrive on the sheer beauty of music, you will find it in spades in Catán’s *Florencia en el Amazonas* and Bizet’s *The Pearl Fishers*.

*Florencia en el Amazonas* originated as an HGO co-commission and was given its world premiere here in 1996. By popular demand, we revived it as soon as we could, in 2001, and it has become one of the most popular among HGO commissions. Director Francesca Zambello and the design team have updated their original production to include more extensive choreography and projections by S. Katy Tucker, which evoke the steamy climate, lush vegetation, and movement of the steamboat as it journeys down the Amazon River. (Even so, there’s nothing more atmospheric than the music of the late Daniel Catán, who has been compared to Puccini, Debussy, and Ravel.) Internationally renowned soprano and HGO Studio alumna Ana María Martínez performs the title role of a famous opera diva in search of her lost love, leading a fine ensemble cast.

We are staging *The Pearl Fishers* for the first time, with the rising young conductor Roderick Cox at the helm. The 2018 winner of the prestigious Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award, Cox is conducting his first opera after most recently serving as associate conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra. This impossibly beautiful opera features one of the most famous and heart-melting duets in the repertoire, “Au fond du temple saint.” Singing that showpiece duet will be the wonderful tenor-baritone combination of Lawrence Brownlee and Mariusz Kwiecień as the two best buddies whose long friendship is derailed when both fall in love with the same unattainable woman—the priestess Leïla, portrayed by HGO Studio alumna Andrea Carroll, our radiant Maria from last season’s *West Side Story*.

If you have been attending HGO performances for a while, you have likely noticed how often we cast alumni of our prestigious young artists training program, the HGO Studio. The single most important tool we have for recruiting these exciting young talents is our annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers, which concludes each year with Concert of Arias, the competition’s final round. If you haven’t yet made arrangements to attend this exciting artistic event and Studio fundraiser on Friday, February 1, please don’t delay! See our calendar on p. 92 for more information.

Thank you for joining us—we hope you enjoy the performance.

Sincerely,

Patrick Summers  
Artistic and Music Director  
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Mariusz Kuvielė in The Pearl Fishers. Photo by Todd Rosenberg.
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NEWS & NOTES

In the Holiday Spirit

HGO embraced the holidays on December 15 with a sing-along featuring members of the HGO Chorus and Studio on the Hess Deck at Discovery Green. HGOco Music Director and Composer in Residence Damien Sneed led the singers from the piano. HGOco Director Carleen Graham emceed the event.

Titled Transforming the Spirit through Song, the sing-along was part of HGO’s Seeking the Human Spirit initiative. It was a multicultural event, including not only well known carols such as “Deck the Halls” and “Silent Night,” but also popular Spanish-language carols such as “Los peces en el río” and “Las apariciones Guadalupanas,” the spiritual “Mary Had a Baby,” a special arrangement of the Hebrew song “Bashana Haba’ah,” and more. “Feliz Navidad” provided a fitting ending. Attracted by the beautiful music, some 500 Houstonians came by to listen or join in.

In Good Hands

It seems HGO was in very good hands when it comes to our recently released recording of the world premiere opera The House without a Christmas Tree: The producer behind it, Blanton Alspaugh, was nominated for a 2018 Grammy Award in the Producer of the Year, Classical, category.

Alspaugh also produced the recording of the world premiere of Jake Heggie’s Great Scott, which premiered at the Dallas Opera under the baton of HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers.

HGO’s recording, featuring Lauren Snouffer, Daniel Belcher, and Heidi Stober, was released in September on the Pentatone label. It is available for download, streaming, or as a CD through Pentatone, Amazon, and other outlets.
HOUSTON GRAND OPERA mourns the passing of a beloved fellow Houstonian, former President George H. W. Bush, only months after the passing of his wife, former First Lady Barbara Bush.

President and Mrs. Bush attended many HGO performances over the years, most recently Carousel in 2016. An excited matinee audience welcomed them. Near the end of Carousel’s first act, the character of Billy muses on the possibilities of what kind of life his unborn child might have, including, he says, “President of the United States.” Our audience broke into applause. Sitting next to the Bushes, I was able to hear Barbara tenderly say, “Oh, George, how wonderful.” Even the members of the Secret Service detail were visibly moved.

HGO’s first staging of Carousel occurred during President Bush’s term in office. The performances coincided with the 16th annual Economic Summit, which was held in Houston. One performance, on July 7, 1990, was designated as the Presidential Performance and was attended by the president and first lady and other VIPs.

President George H. W. Bush was one of only two former presidents (the other being John Adams) to have been vice president, president, and the father of a president. George and Barbara Bush will be remembered as genuinely dedicated public servants, passionate boosters for Houston, and active participants in the life of the city. HGO was always thrilled to welcome them to our performances, and we join with the rest of the nation in mourning their loss.

—Patrick Summers

The Bushes didn’t just attend HGO performances—they also came backstage, chatted with the cast, and good-naturedly posed for photos. At top right, Mr. Bush kids around with Trevor Casey, Cio-Cio-San’s son Sorrow in our 2010 production of Madame Butterfly. Below, Mr. and Mrs. Bush are shown with the cast and conductor of Carousel, 2016.
IN REMEMBRANCE

BOB MCNAIR

A SELF-MADE SUCCESS STORY in the energy industry, Bob was best known as the founder, senior chairman, and CEO of the Houston Texans NFL team. Since Bob heroically returned the NFL to our city in 2002, Houstonians got a magnificent new stadium and have hosted two Super Bowls.

As a businessman and philanthropist, Bob’s dedication to making Houston a better place has left an indelible legacy. “He certainly loved this city, and supported causes that raised its profile, as well as humanitarian causes,” says HGO Managing Director Perryn Leech. “He was a man of few words, but when you shook Bob’s hand and hugged Janice, you just felt that the world was somehow a better place. Houston has lost one of its great leaders.”

A beloved member of the HGO family, Bob served as chair of the HGO Board of Directors (1995–97) and supported our mainstage productions, special events, and educational programs through the Robert and Janice McNair Foundation. In addition to helping the company get back on its feet after Hurricane Harvey, Bob and his wife Janice’s generosity and vision established HGO’s Family and Holiday Opera Series and allowed tens of thousands of children and families to experience the magic of opera around the holiday season.

Whenever we think of this remarkable man, we will have a song in our hearts.

MARIA BLAKE

HOUSTON GRAND OPERA is deeply saddened by the sudden passing of Maria Blake, HGO’s systems manager, on November 7. She was a devoted longtime colleague and a company person to her core. At HGO, she was surrounded by artistic temperaments, which are notoriously inept at technology, the field in which Maria had endless patience and a passion for fixing problems. Maria’s work reached everyone in the company, and she always made everyone feel as though their needs were a priority.

Maria was also a key player in setting up the Guild’s Opera Boutique tech needs. The Guild recalls many nights when the Boutique would not have been able to accept credit cards if not for Maria. Steve Brenner, former president of the Guild, says, “Wherever we set up the Opera Boutique, whether it was at the Opera, Miller Outdoor Theatre, or one of our events, she would stick around to make sure the boutique was up and running. She got the job done, always with a smile.”

We will always remember Maria’s profound kindness and selfless willingness to help, and we offer our deepest condolences to her family.
Dear Opera Patron,

Welcome to Houston Grand Opera for tonight’s performance of Daniel Catán’s romantic opera *Florencia en el Amazonas*, based on the works of Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez.

Bank of America is proud to be a part of Houston’s wonderfully inclusive culture by supporting Latin American voices—in business, in the community, and in the arts. Last season, we were thrilled to support the return of José “Pepe” Martínez and Leonard Foglia’s *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna/To Cross the Face of the Moon*, the world’s first mariachi opera. *Florencia en el Amazonas* was the first Spanish-language commission by a North American opera company at the time of its premiere in 1996, and remains one of HGO’s most enduring commissions.

Bank of America believes the arts matter: they help economies thrive, help individuals connect with each other and across cultures, and educate and enrich societies. A thriving economy that has equitable opportunities for all is good for business and for the arts.

We share with HGO the vision of making arts accessible to more communities. Bank of America is honored to join HGO in sharing works like *Florencia en el Amazonas*—powerful, contemporary stories that resonate with our diverse community.

Sincerely,

Hong Ogle
Houston Market President
Bank of America
Dear Opera Patron,

We’re so glad that you’ve joined us for Houston Grand Opera’s first-ever production of Bizet’s *The Pearl Fishers*, the most frequently requested opera by HGO audiences. Vinson & Elkins LLP is thrilled to support this vivid, colorful production starring some of opera’s brightest stars.

Vinson & Elkins is an international law firm with 700 lawyers across 14 offices worldwide. Our lawyers and staff truly believe in the value of giving back, and we especially value our tradition of supporting the arts here in our hometown of Houston. When Hurricane Harvey flooded the Theater District last year, V&E was proud to help resident performing arts companies like HGO recover so that they could continue making Houston a world-class cultural destination.

Our longstanding partnership with HGO includes pro bono legal services, special event hosting, board leadership, and support of spectacular productions like the one we are about to experience this evening.

Thank you for attending HGO. We hope you enjoy this performance of *The Pearl Fishers*.

Sincerely,

Scott Wulfe
Managing Partner
Vinson & Elkins LLP
As we continue to investigate the theme of Transformation in our second season of *Seeking the Human Spirit*, we have planned a slate of intriguing events that correlate with upcoming repertoire and are open to the public. Save the dates!

**MARCH**

On **March 23 and 24**, join us for *Songs on the Water*, a boat cruise à la *Florencia en el Amazonas*. Buffalo Bayou will stand in for the Amazon River on this 90-minute journey that includes a recital, wine, and light bites. HGO joins Buffalo Bayou Partnership in presenting this unique event, which is part of the Partnership’s re-activation of the waterways post–Hurricane Harvey. It will be an enchanting musical experience for those on the boat as well as passers-by. Visit buffalobayou.org for reservations. Admission $75.

**APRIL**

Two events in April are designed in conjunction with our spring repertoire, Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*...
and the world premiere of Tarik O’Regan and John Caird’s *The Phoenix*, about the colorful life of Mozart’s librettist Lorenzo da Ponte.

On **April 9**, HGO and the Italian Cultural and Community Center present the film *Io, Don Giovanni* (I, Don Giovanni) about the life of Lorenzo da Ponte, his relationship with Mozart, and the creation of the opera *Don Giovanni*. The film also underscores the parallels between the life of Da Ponte and the character he and Mozart brought to life so vividly. April 9, Italian Cultural and Community Center, 1101 Milford St., Houston, TX 77006. Visit HGO.org/HumanSpirit.

On **April 18**, HGO is partnering with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, on *Women Transformed through Art and Opera*, an interactive walking recital. Each of the three female characters in *Don Giovanni* will come to life in different galleries representing a variety of historical periods. A storyteller will lead an interactive dialogue with the audience to provide context in exploring women’s choices and opportunities throughout history. April 18, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1001 Bissonnet, Houston, TX 77005. 6:30–8:30 p.m. **Free** to the public.

**MAY**

The 2018–19 community events for *Seeking the Human Spirit* culminate on **May 20** with *Transforming the Mind and Spirit: An Exploration of Creativity* with Houston Methodist’s Dr. Mauro Ferrari, Maestro Patrick Summers, and other guests who will explore creativity through storytelling, the arts, spirituality, science, mysticism, mental health, and audience participation. May 20, at MATCH, 3400 Main Street, Houston, TX 77002; 7 p.m. $15 admission. Visit HGO.org/ExploringCreativity for tickets.

For more information about these and other community events related to *Seeking the Human Spirit*, please contact Hadia Mawlawi at hmawlawi@hgo.org or at HGO.org/HumanSpirit.
CONGRATULATIONS TO ARTISTIC AND MUSIC DIRECTOR PATRICK SUMMERS ON HIS 20TH ANNIVERSARY WITH HGO.

BY LAURA CHANDLER
Director of Publications
He was just months into his tenure as HGO’s music director, and he was making his company debut. It was unusual—perhaps even unprecedented—that HGO named him as music director before he had ever conducted here. But Patrick Summers seemed tailor made for HGO. He had just made a highly acclaimed Metropolitan Opera debut and conducted several performances in the world premiere of André Previn’s A Streetcar Named Desire at San Francisco Opera, the company where he began his career.

He had just been named principal guest conductor of San Francisco Opera. When he came to Houston, Patrick was given the mission of raising the musical values of HGO. No one could have guessed how well he would succeed and where he would take the company in the 20 years to come.

The Maestro’s signature accomplishment has no doubt been his work with the HGO Orchestra. He came to Houston at a time when HGO and the Houston Symphony, which had played most of the Opera’s performances throughout the company’s history, were mutually ending their partnership.

Beginning in the 2001–02 season, the HGO Orchestra would play all performances going forward.

Patrick knew it would take approximately a decade of working together for the group to become a cohesive opera orchestra, capable of playing the entire spectrum of the repertoire. The musicians worked hard, and sure enough, within one decade, the HGO Orchestra had won high praise for such performances as Handel’s Julius Caesar (“the orchestra plays like silk,” Houston Press), Floyd’s Cold Sassy Tree (“a vigorous, sensitive performance,” San Francisco Chronicle) and Wagner’s Lohengrin (“triumphant,” CultureVulture). The ultimate test came in 2014–17 with Wagner’s Ring cycle: “…even among this stellar cast and fascinating production, the take-away was the magnificently paced conducting of Musical Director Patrick Summers. He had a wonderful orchestra to work with” (TheaterJones review of Götterdämmerung).

Raising the company’s musical values also included raising the level of singing. Patrick has demonstrated an uncanny way of knowing what kinds of roles particular singers are suited for—even roles they never thought they would sing. It was Patrick, according to HGO Director of Artistic Operations and Chorus Master Richard Bado, who pointed Studio alumna Tamara Wilson toward the dramatic Verdi soprano repertoire and gave her the opportunity to sing the challenging role of Amelia in Verdi’s A Masked Ball only months after she finished her Studio training. Her schedule is now filled with the great leading Verdi soprano roles, such as Amelia and Aida. Bado says it was also Patrick who recognized that Christine Goerke should be singing Wagner and hired her to sing Ortrud in Wagner’s Lohengrin (2009). Now she is acclaimed world-wide as a Wagner-Strauss soprano, and HGO has been fortunate to see her as Brünnhilde in the Ring and most recently as the title role in Strauss’s Elektra, among others. Goerke said she thought he was “bananas” when he asked her to sing the mezzo role of Eboli in Don Carlos, “but it fit me perfectly. He was right.” Ana María Martínez thought he was “out of his mind” when he asked her to sing Cio-Cio-San in Madame Butterfly.

Twenty years ago—on February 5, 1999, to be exact—HGO opened a new production of La traviata. The stars onstage were Patricia Racette and Ramón Vargas, but the star in the orchestra pit was 35-year-old Patrick Summers.

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‘It’s hard to believe that it’s already Patrick’s 20 year anniversary at HGO! His arrival marked a new era for the company. The musical standards and expectations were raised—exactly what HGO needed at that point in our history. He has been a terrifically supportive boss and colleague.’

—Richard Bado, Director of Artistic Operations and Chorus Master
“HGO has so much to be grateful to David Gockley for. It was his vision that set the foundations for where we stand today, and one of his most significant moments came when he decided to appoint Patrick as music director and give him the resources to build an HGO Orchestra. That decision is the backbone of our artistic rise through the last 20 years. In hindsight, that may have been the defining moment in HGO’s history. Under Patrick’s baton, the orchestra has evolved into one of the finest ensembles of any opera company.

Over the past seven years that he and I have jointly led HGO, we have all witnessed the breadth of Patrick’s musical influences. Thank you, Patrick, for an amazing 20 years, and here’s to the future and the continuing journey!” —Perryn Leech, Managing Director

Now it’s one of her signature roles. The list goes on.

In 2011, Patrick added “artistic director” to his title, and since that time, he has been able to realize his vision to an even greater extent. HGO’s groundbreaking six-year initiative Seeking the Human Spirit was his conception, and he lays out much of the thinking behind it in his recently published book, The Spirit of This Place. He has introduced the company to repertoire and artists we may never have known. He increases HGO’s visibility through appearances as a guest conductor with opera companies around the world, and he is well known as a sensitive collaborator on new works. Some of his most prized recognition includes the 2015 San Francisco Opera Medal, the company’s highest honor, and an honorary doctoral degree from his alma mater, Indiana University, where he began studying while still in his mid-teens.

In an interview for Opera Cues, when Summers had been with the company for only five years, he was asked what stood out to him as significant personal triumphs. He had this to say:

“When I came to Houston, I was at a career crossroads—I was going to either take a European orchestra or stay in the United States. I think to make a difference in an American company is the overriding reward, given the dire state of the art in the United States. I do hope that in this country, we will recognize what artistic expression means to a body of people. It’s the art we create that is going to define who we are when we’re not here.”

We are glad that when he stood at that crossroads, he chose HGO.

Thank you, Patrick! We look forward to many more years ahead.”
Ana María Martínez—singing the title role in *Florencia en el Amazonas*—speaks about her own journey with Daniel Catán’s breakthrough opera.
In 2001—a scant five years after HGO premiered Florencia en el Amazonas—it was brought back by popular demand. Ana María Martínez was singing the role of Rosalba, and that’s when she first met composer Daniel Catán. Martínez recalls him as “a radiant man—so intelligent, so quick-witted. Kind, gentle, with a childlike gleam in his eye.” Martínez quickly became friends with the composer and his wife, Andrea Puente-Catán.

Catán was eager for Martínez to sing the title role of the opera, which was rapidly gaining traction: audiences embraced it, and many U.S. opera companies had programmed the work for future seasons. On the surface, it almost seemed like a given that she would eventually sing Florencia, perhaps to everyone but Martínez herself. At the time, she told him she was honored by the compliment but that because of the role’s difficulty, she couldn’t consider it until—maybe—years down the road. After all, she was still in the early stages of her career, having been an HGO Studio artist during the 1994–95 season.

Martínez recalls that the question of her singing the role was the main subject of her last long phone conversation with the Catáns before his untimely death in 2011. Daniel wanted to know why the role was so difficult, and she laid it out for him: much of it lies in the soprano’s passaggio, which she likens to the narrow part of an hourglass. The bottom part is the lower register and the top part represents the high range. “If you’re sitting too long on that neck part,” Martínez explains, “the voice can start to feel stuck and weighted. To sit in that neck and then have to blossom on the top with these glorious high notes can be very difficult. You need to have tremendous command of your body in order to navigate that without taxing yourself.”

Finally, Martínez knew the time had come and accepted HGO’s invitation to sing Florencia and another one from Florida Grand Opera, where she performed to spectacular reviews last spring. Andrea Puente-Catán was present, and all her hopes were realized: “She has a velvet voice that just caresses you. And she was flying these notes—that’s what Daniel does, he flies the voice and then he gets rid of the orchestra, it’s very sparse. She floated those notes so beautifully. And she speaks impeccable Spanish. She may have grown up in New York, but deep down, she’s a Latin American woman.”

Martínez did spend most of her growing-up years in New York City, not far from the Metropolitan Opera. Her mother, opera soprano Evangelina Colón, allowed her to sit in on her voice lessons. But she was born in Puerto Rico and remembers being at her beloved grandmother’s house at about age five, where she would sit, listen, and observe whenever one of her grandmother’s many visitors would come to call.

**SHE MAY HAVE GROWN UP IN NEW YORK, BUT DEEP DOWN, SHE’S A LATIN AMERICAN WOMAN.**

—Andrea Puente-Catán

Visitors inevitably commented on how quiet and well behaved she was, but, as she says, she was busily “clocking everything.” When the caller would leave, Ana would re-enact the entire conversation, complete with any quirks or accents, and her family would laugh and say she was born for the theater. Those powers of observation, evidenced at such an early age, have stood her in good stead over the years.
Florencia en el Amazonas, Catán’s second opera, was the first Spanish-language opera to be commissioned by U.S. opera companies—Houston, L.A., and Seattle. Inspired by the magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez, Catán and his librettist, Marcela Fuentes-Berain, created a classic journey story in which several characters undergo life-altering changes. Catán himself described the opera as a journey to transcendent love—with Florencia herself experiencing the greatest transformation. In magical realism, the fantastical exists right alongside the mundane; those magical elements are manifest in the opera through the character Riolobo, who is able to command the river spirits, and in some plot turns that can’t be explained by the laws of science. You’ll know them when you see them—no spoilers here.

As Florencia, Martínez portrays a fictional opera singer—beloved in her native country of Brazil and a sort of national heroine—who is returning to sing a concert at the opera house in Manaus. Florencia left Brazil 20 years earlier to pursue her career, and she has triumphed all over the world. But she left someone behind—her lover, Cristóbal—and her real reason for returning is to reunite with him. Florencia is traveling to Manaus via the steamboat El Dorado with several other passengers, none of whom know her identity. When Rosalba, one of the passengers, discovers Florencia’s true identity, she is devastated.

Once back in his homeland, Catán became friends with some of Latin America’s greatest literary figures. Among them were Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz, whose play La hija de Rappaccini (Rappaccini’s Daughter) was the basis for Catán’s first opera. Another close friend was the Colombian writer Álvaro Mutis, a close friend of Gabriel García Márquez. “Álvaro Mutis talked to Daniel a lot about the river, how it moves. The river is the heart of Florencia—a character you never see but which is always present.”

Another unseen character is Cristóbal, the lover Florencia left behind and is now trying to find. “Every time she thinks about him, there’s a chord in the harp, a little Tinkerbell moment,” she laughs.

Florencia en el Amazonas was Catán’s second opera; his third, Salsipuedes (2004), was also an HGO commission and had a starring role for Ana María Martínez. He wrote Il Postino for L.A. Opera; he died before completing his fifth opera, Meet John Doe, based on the Frank Capra film.

“He really enjoyed writing Salsipuedes,” says Puente-Catán, “but he was very present. He always loved what he was doing at the present.”
whom recognize the star among them. One of those passengers is Rosalba, an ambitious young journalist whose career means everything to her. She admires Florencia most of all for her strength and independence, as someone who devoted herself completely to her art. She has spent two years researching Florencia, and, undaunted by the fact that the diva is known to be extremely private and “doesn’t speak to anyone,” Rosalba hopes to meet and interview her in Manaus.

Having portrayed Rosalba in the past, Martínez has a clearer perspective on both characters. “When I—as Rosalba—meet Florencia, all I know is that she’s another woman on the boat. I don’t know who she is. She looks very glamorous, but she’s just another passenger.” Rosalba finally discovers the identity of her fellow traveler in a scene between the two of them toward the end of the opera. Her notebook containing two years’ worth of research on Florencia has gotten soaked by the river water and she is lamenting how much work she has lost. Because her fellow passenger speaks so authoritatively about Florencia, Rosalba suddenly realizes she is speaking to the diva herself; “When I finally realize that it is Florencia, she helps me understand that even if I do want to be a career woman, it’s only if I come from my heart that I will truly reach my greatest potential.” The scene is so powerful that when Martínez sang
Florencia for the first time, she says, “I teared up, because I realized it was like having a conversation with my younger self and telling her, ‘Yes, go for the sun, the moon, and the stars, but make sure you come from your heart.’ It’s a full circle moment, and it’s life-changing for Rosalba.” Not surprisingly, this scene tops the list of Martínez’s favorite moments in the opera.

“I can identify so much with the character of Florencia,” she adds. “This is a woman who is probably in her vocal prime—I would say close to midlife. She has a lot of star power and is well-known and well-established, but she realizes that no matter what great accomplishment she has realized, it means nothing if she doesn’t have someone with whom to share the joys of life. Some people think that an opera singer’s life is very glamorous—we get to wear these extraordinary costumes or concert gowns and travel all over the world. But that’s one aspect of it. The other aspect is tremendous sacrifice of time—time with loved ones. As a mother, it’s very hard to be on the road and not with my son. If I am on the road, it’s usually within two weeks, I’ll either fly back home or he can fly with a family member to where I am. And my fiancé also travels a lot with me but can’t be with me all the time. All of that to say it’s very important to dedicate time to your family and your loved ones. I think if I had performed the role of Florencia much younger, I would not have grasped all of that the way I can now.”

No one can tell whether Florencia en el Amazonas will enter the repertoire permanently, but since its premiere more than 20 years ago, it has proven to have great audience appeal. It has been seen all over the United States and in Europe. L.A. Times critic Mark Swed, who attended the 1996 premiere in Houston, said this in reviewing L.A. Opera’s revival of the piece in 2014: “Catán’s overt neo-Romanticism wound up as the main reason ‘Florencia’ caught on (even in Europe) and helped generate a new genre of populist opera.”

“Whenever anyone comes to the theater and falls in love with a piece, it’s because it’s reached them, it speaks to them,” says Martínez. With all due respect to magical realism, music’s ability to do that—to touch people across ages, languages, and cultures—is the most magical thing of all.

“*My family* values local ownership, long-term investments, and excellent service. It’s why, in 1994, we helped found Houston Trust Company. To provide families and businesses like ours with their own independent investment and asset management resource, rooted right here in Texas.”
WINTER 2019

QUICK START GUIDE
Florencia en el Amazonas

STORY IN A NUTSHELL

The riverboat El Dorado is bound for the opera house in Manaus, Brazil, where the legendary opera diva Florencia Grimaldi is to make a triumphant return. Riolobo, a mystical character who assumes many forms, introduces the passengers: a young journalist, Rosalba, who is writing a biography about Florencia; a long-married, bickering couple, Paula and Alvaro; and the ship’s Capitán and his nephew, Arcadio. The last to board is the diva herself, traveling incognito.

Florencia’s secret reason for making the journey is to find her lover, Cristóbal, a naturalist who ventured off into the Amazon jungle years ago and seems to have vanished. But this turns out to be no ordinary journey, as a storm forces the passengers to confront their deepest fears and longings. Finally, when the boat nears Manaus, it is discovered that no one may disembark because of a cholera epidemic. In despair at being unable to fulfill her search for Cristóbal, Florencia allows her spirit to drift toward his in a mystical reunion.

A full synopsis appears on p. 39.

FLORENCIA EN EL AMAZONAS IN CONTEXT

Daniel Catán (1949–2011) had composed the successful Rappaccini’s Daughter (1991) before HGO commissioned him to compose Florencia en el Amazonas (1996), now one of the most frequently performed among HGO’s commissions. It was the first opera commissioned from a Latin composer by U.S. opera companies. Catán’s other works include Salsipuedés (2004), also an HGO commission, and Il Postino (2010) for L.A. Opera. He was working on an operatic adaptation of Frank Capra’s film Meet John Doe when he died unexpectedly of a heart attack. The critic David Patrick Stearns wrote in his obituary for the Guardian, “The five operas he wrote…shed the last inhibitions in his generation’s retreat from modernism into unabashed romanticism…US audiences embraced his output with relief that such music could still be written with such conviction.”

WHAT IS MAGICAL REALISM?

Florencia en el Amazonas was inspired by the literary movement magical realism, especially by the writings of Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014), one of the movement’s most important proponents.

Magical realism suggests that our definition of reality is too narrow and that the fantastical exists alongside (and interacts with) the workaday world. Lois Parkinson Zamora, professor of comparative literature at the University of Houston and an authority on magical realism, explains it this way in her article “The Real Thing,” Stagebill, spring 2001: “Magical realism undermines our certainties, and we eventually accept…the fusion, or coexistence, of contradictory worlds—worlds that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction. Magical realist fiction is not ‘either/or,’ but both at once.”

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Catán’s musical style has been compared to that of Puccini, Debussy, and Ravel. Some of the most glorious moments appear in the title character’s trilogy of arias: “¡No solo soy mi nombre!” (I am not just my name), where she regrets her decision to leave Cristóbal in pursuit of fame; “¿Es esta luz la muerte?” (Is this light my death?), where she questions whether or not she’s alive after the storm subsides; and “¿Dónde estás, Cristóbal?” (Where are you, Cristóbal?), where her soul transforms in order to reunite with her lover as the opera’s finale.

Ana María Martínez, who performs the role of Florencia, describes her own journey with the opera, including her favorite moments, in the article “Ana en el Amazonas,” pp. 25–29.
A 21ST-CENTURY LOOK AT THE PEARL FISHERS

BY JEREMY JOHNSON
Dramaturg
THE PEARL FISHERS by Georges Bizet
was composed in 1863 with a libretto by Eugène Cormon and Michel Carré. Set in “ancient Ceylon,” the librettists had quickly relocated the action from the original setting of Mexico for unknown reasons, but likely due to a string of embarrassing defeats Napoleon III’s military encountered in the Latin American country. Not knowing much about the island of Ceylon—present-day Sri Lanka—the French librettists (who likely did not know much about Mexico, either) wrote inaccurate details into the story that would go on to affect how we design and perform the opera today.

As the world becomes more diverse and more interconnected than ever, 19th-century art such as this—written with little understanding of the cultural context of its setting—brings to light many questions of cultural appropriation and performance practice in the 21st century. As part of HGO’s aspiration to advance discussions of those questions, HGO Dramaturg Jeremy Johnson hosted a conversation about these topics with HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers; Sixto Wagan, director of the Center for Art and Social Engagement at the University of Houston; Gomika Udugamasooriya, associate professor of medicinal chemistry at UH and connoisseur of traditional Sri Lankan music and theater; and Thushara Ranatunga, president of the Sri Lankan American Association of Houston.

Jeremy Johnson: Some of the cultural implications of this opera are grounded in factual inaccuracies. It seems that the most glaring inaccuracy is that the characters are called observers of Hinduism, when historically it would have been more likely for them to have practiced Buddhism.

Gomika Udugamasooriya: Right. If it’s based on Sri Lanka, Buddhism is the main practice of the island. Hindus are there, but as a minority; the Kandyan Kingdom was established to protect Buddhism, and over 75 percent of the island has been Buddhist for hundreds of years.

JJ: When did Hinduism come to Sri Lanka?

GU: The 10–11th century is the major transition when Hinduism was introduced, but, again, it was never a major practice in Sri Lanka. The Tamil people practiced Hinduism, and they actually ruled Sri Lanka from time to time, but Buddhism had been around since even before 250 B.C.E. There is documented history that the Buddha himself visited Sri Lanka three times.

JJ: The libretto specifically calls Leïla a Hindu priestess, and she prays to Brahma and Shiva. Would that be entirely inaccurate?

Thushara Ranatunga: It’s reasonable to think that she could be Hindu, depending on when and where on the island it’s meant to take place. By the time the British colonized in 1815, the northern coastal areas were majority Tamil Hindus; the Kandyan Kingdom was Buddhist and was more inland on the island.

JJ: When the British colonized the island in 1815, the Dutch [earlier colonizers] gave them documents about the Jaffna peninsula. That information seems to have spread in 19th century Europe as representative of the entire island and the whole culture.

GU: That has been the case for a long time; the Jaffna area is the closest part of Sri Lanka to the Indian peninsula, so the Jaffna peninsula has been majority Tamil Hindus. The British suppressed the majority Sinhalese [native Sri Lankan and primarily Buddhist] in order to support the minority Tamil Hindus and create more tension between them. That has continued even today and is arguably the root cause of the Sri Lankan Civil War [1983–2009].

TR: That is probably why, in the 1800s, most Europeans thought Sri Lanka was majority Hindu.

JJ: It could have been justified for the librettists to write about Hindu characters, but there are two more aspects that discredit that: they call it “ancient” Ceylon—before Hinduism came to the island—and Leïla was first seen at a temple in Kandy.

GU: Yes, that would be wrong!
PATRICK SUMMERS: In just the time we have been speaking, we have already done more research than Bizet, Cormon, or Carré into the history of Sri Lanka. I don’t say that to be glib or funny; it’s absolutely true. They were not writing an opera about Ceylon, and they weren’t writing an opera about Mexico. They were looking for a place that was far from their reality, and un-French, in which they could set a typical French opera of the period. If it were being written today, it would be questioned from the outset why three French men were writing an opera about another culture and about a Hindu priestess—is that their story to tell? Now, we would have a very different cultural goal and bring a different set of sensitivities, I would hope, to the chosen setting.

SIXTO WAGAN: One of the things I want to amplify is that in contemporary performance, it’s a question about whose story it is to tell, and it’s a question about authenticity. This opera was not about authenticity at the time it was written, nor was it even about satire. It is supposed to be a romance in exotic places.

PS: I’ve often thought about a conversation we had, Sixto, in which you talked about Paul Gauguin and his paintings of French Polynesia. What you said has stayed with me; that Gauguin was existing in an imperial time, from a country that was actively colonizing Polynesia—no matter how sensitive or insensitive he may have been with his paintings, he still represented an oppressing culture.

SW: Gauguin became so popular by presenting an exoticism, particularly the imagery of naked Tahitian women. It was hyper-sexualized and strictly from a male gaze. He made these amazing paintings that are now part of a canon, but people at that time thought that this was Tahiti. But it wasn’t really about that culture or the people there; it was about Gauguin and his sexual fantasies.

PS: And then appropriating their culture for his own gain.

JJ: Artistic exoticism from this time period seems to run parallel with colonialism itself, appropriating another culture for one’s own gain. Can you talk more about that intersection of colonialism, exoticism, and appropriation?

SW: It’s a question about contemporary perception—what we’re talking about is how we land these historical pieces in contemporary society. It is about the gaze that the piece was written in, understanding what we’re seeing, and contextualizing it.

PS: The parallelism, the sort of cultural conversation that should happen with that, is that these works put those locales and their culture fully through a white European lens. That becomes the prism through which you view those places, and,
whether it’s stated or unstated, the observing culture becomes the dominant one.

**JJ:** And then we incorrectly assume we understand the culture these historical artistic works attempt to represent. One of the premises in *The Pearl Fishers* is that Leila will be sacrificed if she does not remain in solitude all night; that strikes me as a white European lens into this culture—is it at all historically accurate?

**GU:** No; in both cultural and religious contexts, the Sri Lankan attitude is completely opposed to that. We’ve had wars, of course, but sacrifice is completely opposite to the tenets of Sri Lankan culture and of Buddhism. Buddhism is about spreading love and kindness and developing yourself; it is about identifying yourself—there’s no help from gods, no praying to them, no sacrifice to them, nothing like that.

**JJ:** So the pearl divers also would not have even prayed for assistance with the dive?

**TR:** No, the gods in Buddhism are not there for outside assistance like that. And, also, pearl diving itself is not widely practiced; it became more commercialized under the British colonization, but it is not an important historical tradition.

**JJ:** The title of the opera itself is a Western lens on Sri Lankan culture! Knowing that these historical artistic works are created through that white European lens, what can companies do today to produce them appropriately and sensitively?

**SW:** One of the aspects is that we’re having this conversation. It’s about understanding what the context is, and recognizing that historical context and contemporary context are different—and that we have to open the discussion in order to be able to separate those ideas. It’s a question about why we are presenting these works—the beauty of the music, the beauty of this work and the artists should be presented. But it’s also a question of how are we making sure this is sensitive and aware: are we cognizant of how it plays to the audience, are we cognizant of how it furthers the story? And it’s about the intention of what you are trying to accomplish and making that intention clear to the audience. Do we present it exactly how it should have been at that moment, or are we supposed to understand and present it as contemporaries and our interpretation of that?

**GU:** For this piece in particular, it’s also striking when I see productions that are completely different from the Sri Lankan culture. Simple things like the boat and the pillars—you can extract those and design them much more closely to Sri Lankan culture. I saw one video of this [the Zandra Rhodes] production, and the appearance is much closer to Sri Lankan culture than other images I saw of other productions.

**PS:** The economics of buying, building, or renting an opera set are also very complicated. Our upcoming production is 15 years old and is one of the few existing sets of *The Pearl Fishers* we could have rented to fit on our stage at HGO. But I’m glad that it is closer to Sri Lankan culture than others. I’m interested also in the topic of casting; we always look initially for someone who is vocally and dramatically suited for a role. Should our starting point be trying to find someone with, in this example, Sri Lankan heritage?

**SW:** Is it the only thing you think about? No. Is it the first thing? I don’t think it’s the first thing. But I do think that the live, acoustic nature of the art form has a broad range of interpretation for what that sound could be—so, being vocally and dramatically suited for a role could be different than how it has been heard before. Colorblind casting in its ideal sense is so beautiful and so wonderful, but I don’t know if that is something that always resonates as an audience member. I would love there to be a greater diversity of opera singers who can sing all of those major roles—*Madame Butterfly, Turandot,* etc.—and I know that HGO and many other opera companies are doing work in order to increase that pipeline and understand what that is.

**PS:** To diversify the opportunities for people to choose art as a career—that’s where it has to begin.

**SW:** The ideal situation would be that you could find people who could fit any role, not only vocally, but also to present a visual work that makes sense. We can recognize that this is not necessarily the case because this is a very taxing and difficult and amazing art, which not everybody can do. In an ideal world, yes, we are actually going to find a diverse cast that can present those roles; and it works both ways, that not every traditionally Western role needs to be only white people.

**PS:** Absolutely. The art of acting—and it is certainly an art—is central to the discussion, and great acting teaches empathy. You take on the words and feelings of another character in order to learn about them and in order to portray them. And that great creativity is part of the reason that we do these works at all. If a Sri Lankan singer can only play Leila, or an Ethiopian singer can only play Aida—if you can only play yourself, then there’s no creativity, and there’s no empathy, and there’s no learning.
Georges Bizet (1838–75) was not quite 25 years old when *The Pearl Fishers* premiered on September 30, 1863, at the Théâtre Lyrique in Paris. The public received it warmly, but critics were dismissive and the opera wasn’t performed again in Bizet’s lifetime. The composer died at age 36, three months after his masterpiece, *Carmen*, premiered. Depressed because of *Carmen*’s apparent failure—it was initially panned because of its violence—Bizet died thinking he had never produced a successful opera. *Carmen*, of course, is one of the most popular operas in the repertoire, and *The Pearl Fishers* is enjoying a modern renaissance: it has been performed more times in the last 30 years than in the previous 125.

Find out about the opera’s historical and cultural context in “A 21st Century Look at *The Pearl Fishers*,” pp. 31–34.

**What To Listen For**

*The Pearl Fishers* contains one of the most famous duets in the entire operatic canon: “Au fond du temple saint” (Deep in the holy temple), in which Nadir and Zurga reaffirm their commitment to their friendship and vow not to let their love for Leïla come between them. You won’t have to wait long to hear it, as it is sung within the first 20 minutes of the opera! But don’t worry—there are many other musical riches in store, including Nadir’s aria “Je crois entendre encore” (I think I can still hear), when he recalls first falling in love with Leïla; Leïla’s aria “Comme autrefois” (As before), when she reflects on her own love for Nadir; an impassioned love duet between Nadir and Leïla in the second act; and Zurga’s heartbreaking aria “O Nadir,” when he is filled with regret for sentencing his childhood friend to death.

**Fun Fact**

While the music of *The Pearl Fishers* is sublime, its libretto is generally regarded as weak and the ending improbable. The librettists themselves, Eugène Cormon and Michel Carré, admitted they would have worked harder on it if they had recognized Bizet’s genius as a composer. According to Bizet biographer Mina Curtiss, Cormon and Carré’s inability to agree on an ending for the story infuriated the producer, who told them to just burn the libretto. Either misunderstanding the remark or taking inspiration from it, they created the ending with Zurga setting fire to the village to create a diversion for Nadir and Leïla’s escape.
HOUSTON GRAND OPERA PRESENTS

FLORENCIA EN EL AMAZONAS

An Opera in Two Acts | Music by Daniel Catán | Libretto by Marcela Fuentes-Berain

BROWN THEATER, WORTHAM THEATER CENTER

Sung in Spanish with projected English translation

Co-commissioned by Houston Grand Opera Association, Los Angeles Music Center Opera, and Seattle Opera. The original commission of Florencia en el Amazonas was generously underwritten by Cullen Trust for the Performing Arts; Nancy and Rich Kinder and Sara and Bill Morgan; Shell Foundation; and Nelda and H. J. Lutcher Stark Foundation. Commissioned in part through a generous grant from Drs. Dennis and Susan Carlyle.

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CAST (in order of vocal appearance)

Riolobo: Norman Garrett *
Rosalba: Alicia Gianni †
Paula: Nancy Fabiola Herrera *
Alvaro: Thomas Glass †
Capitán: David Pittsinger *
Florenzia: Ana María Martínez †
Arcadio: Joshua Guerrero *
Cabin Boy: Daniel Boyd *

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Patrick Summers
Margaret Alkek Williams Chair
Director: Francesca Zambello
Associate Director: E. Loren Meeker
Set Designer: Robert Israel
Costume Designer: Catherine Zuber
Lighting Designer: Mark McCullough
Projection/Video Designer: S. Katy Tucker
Choreographer: Eric Sean Fogel
Chorus Master: Richard Bado †
Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair
Musical Preparation: Kirill Kuzmin †
Kyle Naig †
Stephanie Larsen/Valerie and Miguel Mira-Quesada/John M. O’Quinn Foundation Endowed Fund Fellow
Blair Salter †
Dr. Saul and Ursula Balagura/Audrey Jones Beck Endowed Fund Fellow
Damien Sneed
Spanish Diction Coach: Nicolas Shumway *
Stage Manager: Christopher Staub
Assistant Director: Joshua Horowitz *
Supertitles by: Patricia Houk, adapted by Jeremy Johnson

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Supertitles called by: Emily Kern

Flying by Foy
Scenery for Florencia en el Amazonas constructed by Seattle Opera and Cincinnati Opera.
Published by Associated Music Publishers, Inc.
Performing artists, stage directors, and choreographers are represented by the American Guild of Musical Artists, the union for opera professionals in the United States.
Scenic, costume, and lighting designers and assistant designers are represented by United Scenic Artists, I.A.T.S.E., Local USA-829.
Orchestral musicians are represented by the Houston Professional Musicians Association, Local #65-699, American Federation of Musicians.
Stage crew personnel provided by I.A.T.S.E., Local #51.
Wardrobe personnel provided by Theatrical Wardrobe Union, Local #896.
This production is being recorded for archival purposes.

* HGO debut † HGO Studio artist ‡ Former HGO Studio artist
I am thrilled to return to _Florencia en el Amazonas_ for so many reasons. The opera, which premiered here in 1996, fused the work of a powerful contemporary composer, the late Daniel Catán, with the multi-layered literary approach of Gabriel García Márquez, captured in Marcela Fuentes-Berain’s magical libretto. The story and music inspired a lush visual presentation, which now features stunning new projections and choreography, and we are thrilled to showcase the great Puerto Rican–born diva Ana María Martínez in the title role.

It is amazing to me that more than 20 years have passed since I joined the team that would bring this opera to life. In the early 1990s, I traveled to Colombia with Daniel Catán, Marcela Fuentes-Berain, HGO’s then–general director, David Gockley, and the designers of the production to visit Gabriel García Márquez with the intention of putting together a new opera inspired by his works. At that time, political and drug-related violence was rampant in that country—from the 1980s into the early 21st century, some three million Colombians were displaced. (Anyone who has watched an episode of _Narcos_ has a sense of what it was like then.)

Thanks to the hospitality of Gloria Zea, the longtime director of the Colombian Opera and a kind of _de facto_ Colombian minister of culture, we had the incredible opportunity to meet and work with Márquez. We were flown into his walled compound deep in the jungle in an open helicopter, protected by guards armed with machine guns. We landed on a helipad near his grounds and went through the underbrush in a jeep with our guards.

The journey itself was a thrill, but meeting and working with Márquez was truly unforgettable. The aura of his very being was like the magical realism that spilled onto the pages of his novels. The sentences that came out of his mouth were as astonishing as the ones he wrote. He graciosly helped our team to plan and create the tale of the libretto, which was then executed by his student Marcela and given new dimension by Daniel’s lush music.

After our time in his compound, we went on to visit the Colombian state of Amazonas, where the river begins, to experience its spirit and try to capture it for the stage. Once we checked into the aptly named Hotel Anaconda, we went trekking through the jungle, led by a guide who thought it was absolutely necessary that we see a real anaconda. (I can assure you that once is enough in my lifetime!) Eventually, we boarded a riverboat—not unlike the one you will see in the production—to travel a segment of the mighty Amazon.

Inspired by our fantastic journey, we finally brought Florencia’s story to the stage in 1996. After its world premiere at Houston Grand Opera, the production transferred to other opera houses in North and Latin America. It was the first Spanish-language opera to be commissioned by a U.S. company, and its continuing life speaks to the high quality of Daniel and Marcela’s work.

As I revisited the opera with my designers, we decided to rework certain visual elements of the production to bring the opera closer to the world of magical realism. But as I see this _Florencia_ take shape again, probably the biggest change is in me. The story may be the same, but I am different, so my life experience colors how I perceive the characters and their journey. The opera features three sets of lovers at different stages of their lives. As I have moved through the journey of my own life, my perspective on these characters and their relationships has evolved, and I bring a new depth of feeling, which I hope is evident in the opera you see this time around. The piece is very close to my heart, and I am grateful for each opportunity to share it with a new audience.

—Francesca Zambello
The performance will last approximately 2 hours and 5 minutes, including one intermission.

**SETTING**
Aboard the *El Dorado*, a steamboat sailing down the Amazon from Leticia, Colombia, to Manaus in the early 1900s.

**ACT I**
On the riverbank, Riolobo, a mystical character who can assume many forms, excitedly announces that the *El Dorado* is bound for the opera house in Manaus. There, the legendary opera diva Florencia Grimaldi, who has not set foot in her native South America for 20 years, will give a concert to reopen the theater. From among the crowds lining the riverbank and selling their local wares, we glimpse the ship’s passengers coming aboard: a young journalist, Rosalba, who is working on a biography about Florencia Grimaldi; Paula and Alvaro, a middle-aged couple journeying to hear Grimaldi in hopes of rekindling their marriage; and the diva herself, traveling incognito. As the Capitán steers the ship out of the busy port, Florencia reflects on the emptiness of her life and her desire to rediscover herself and find her long-lost lover, Cristobal, a butterfly hunter in search of the rare Emerald Muse.

Rosalba accidentally drops her notebook into the river; she is distraught because it contains all her notes for the biography, but it is rescued by the Capitán’s nephew, Arcadio; the two exchange confidences about their longings and desires. Alvaro and Paula attempt to dine on deck, but misunderstandings about the exotic menu lead only to bitter exchanges. Florencia, awakened by the sounds of the jungle, learns from the Capitán that the butterfly hunter disappeared into the jungle without a trace. Later, a tempestuous game of cards contrasts the growing affection between Rosalba and Arcadio and the escalating tension between Paula and Alvaro. A violent storm quickly develops and the ship is carried helplessly in the rushing currents in a downpour of pink rain. Alvaro saves the boat from being crushed by tree trunks but is knocked overboard. With the Capitán unconscious, Riolobo appears in the guise of a river-spirit and implores the mercy of the gods of the river. Arcadio ably takes the helm but is unable to stop the forces of nature as the ship runs aground.

**INTERMISSION**

**ACT II**
In the quiet after the storm, Florencia wonders whether she is alive or dead. Arcadio and Rosalba rejoice to find they have survived the storm, but, frightened by the intensity of their feelings for each other, they vow not to fall in love and risk disillusionment. Paula laments the loss of Alvaro, recognizing that the wall between them was pride—not a lack of love. Riolobo once again calls upon the mystical and transformative powers of the Amazon. Suddenly Alvaro is returned to the boat, explaining that Paula’s voice called him back from the brink of death. On behalf of all the passengers, Florencia thanks him for saving their lives and they resume their journey to Manaus.

Rosalba discovers that her precious notebook has been ruined in the storm. She is distraught by the loss of two years’ work, but Florencia tells her she has lost nothing irreplaceable. The two women begin to argue about the source of Grimaldi’s talents, and when Florencia passionately declares that the diva’s gift sprang from her love for a man, Rosalba suddenly realizes the woman standing before her is the singer herself.

Both pairs of lovers are reconciled to their need for each other by the time the ship nears Manaus, but no one is allowed to disembark because of a cholera outbreak. In despair at being unable to fulfill her search, Florencia allows her spirit to drift toward Cristobal’s in a mystical reunion.

**HGO PERFORMANCE HISTORY**
Daniel Catán’s *Florencia en el Amazonas* was co-commissioned by HGO, Los Angeles Opera, and Seattle Opera, and HGO presented the world premiere in 1996. It was subsequently staged at HGO in the 2000–01 season, with Ana María Martínez in the role of Rosalba. She sings the title role in the 2018–19 season’s performances.
At HGO performances, the excellent natural acoustics of the theaters in the Wortham Theater Center are relied upon to convey sound from the stage and pit. Electronic sound enhancement is used only with spoken dialogue (as in The Merry Widow), in musicals (as in A Little Night Music), in sound effects (thunder), and at the composer’s direction (as in Nixon in China and The Little Prince). Visible microphones are positioned to record performances for archival purposes.

* HGO Orchestra core musician † HGO Orchestra core musician on leave this production ‡ HGO Studio artist
HOUSTON GRAND OPERA

CHORUS

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

Ofelia Adame  Lindsay Lymer
Christopher Childress  Alejandro Magallón
Patrick Contreras  Alisa Magallón
Esteban Cordero  Natasha Monette
Justin Dunkle  Jammieca Mott
Stacia Morgan Dunn  Cristino Perez
Ashly Evans  Geoffrey Peterson
Frankie Hickman  Ardeen Pierre
Austin Hoeltzel  Brian Shircliffe
Jon Janacek  Elizabeth Vickers
Nicole Keeling  Riley Vogel
Wesley Landry  Jennifer Wright

DANCERS

Joshua de Alba
LaRodney Freeman
Jorrell Lawyer-Jefferson
Alison Mixon, soloist
Donald Sayre

SUPERNUMERARIES

Lydia Barnett
Nora Feld
Abby Frankel
Gabriel Loperena
Myles Patterson
Eleni Santikos

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WHO’S WHO

**PATRICK SUMMERS (UNITED STATES)**
*Margaret Alkek Williams Chair Conductor*

Patrick Summers was named artistic and music director of HGO in 2011 after having served as the company’s music director since 1998. Some highlights of his work at HGO include conducting the company’s first-ever complete cycle of Wagner’s *Ring* and its first performances of the Verdi Requiem; collaborating on the world premieres of André Previn’s *Brief Encounter*, Christopher Theofanidis’s *The Refuge*, Jake Heggie’s *It’s a Wonderful Life, The End of the Affair, and Three Decembers*, Carlisle Floyd’s *Cold Sassy Tree* and *Prince of Players*, and Tod Machover’s *Resurrection*; leading the American premiere of Weinberg’s *The Passenger*, both at HGO and on tour to the Lincoln Festival; and nurturing the careers of such artists as Christine Goerke, Ailyn Pérez, Joyce DiDonato, Ana María Martínez, Ryan McKinny, Tamara Wilson, Albina Shagimuratova, Anthony Roth Costanzo, Norman Reinhardt, Jamie Barton, and Dimitri Pittas. Maestro Summers has enjoyed a long association with San Francisco Opera (SFO) and was honored in 2015 with the San Francisco Opera Medal. His work with SFO includes conducting Jake Heggie’s *Moby-Dick*, which was recorded and telecast on PBS’s *Great Performances*. In 2017, he was awarded an honorary doctor of music degree from Indiana University.

This past summer he conducted *La favorite* at Gran Teatre del Liceu, and he conducted *It’s a Wonderful Life* at SFO during the holidays. Earlier this season at HGO, he conducted *The Flying Dutchman*; this spring he conducts the world premiere of Tarik O’Regan and John Caird’s *The Phoenix*.

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**FRANCESCA ZAMBELLO (UNITED STATES)**
*Director*

Internationally renowned director Francesca Zambello has created productions for the Metropolitan Opera; San Francisco Opera; Lyric Opera of Chicago; Washington National Opera; Royal Opera, Covent Garden; Paris Opera; Bavarian State Opera; La Scala; and the Bolshoi. She made her American directorial debut at Houston Grand Opera with a production of *Fidelio* in 1984, and she has since directed many operas at HGO, most recently *West Side Story* last spring. Her 1985 production of *Faust* has been seen multiple times at HGO, most recently in 2016. Others include *Show Boat* (2013), the world premiere of *The Little Prince* (2003) and revivals (2004, 2015), *Of Mice and Men* (2002); the world premiere and subsequent revival of *Florencia en el Amazonas* (1996, 2001); *Prince Igor* (2001); *Billy Budd* and *Madame Butterfly* (1998); and many others. She has also staged plays and musicals on Broadway, at the Royal National Theatre, BAM, the Guthrie Theater, Vienna’s Raimund Theater, the Bregenzer Festival, Sydney Festival, Disneyland, Berlin’s Theater des Westens and at the Kennedy Center. She has served as artistic and general director of the Glimmerglass Festival since 2010 and as artistic director of The Washington National Opera at the Kennedy Center since 2012. She has also served as the artistic advisor to the San Francisco Opera (2005–11) and as the artistic director of the Skylight Theater (1987–92). She has been awarded the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres, the French Grand Prix des Critiques for her work at the Paris Opera (twice), the Russian Federation’s medal for Service to Culture, three Olivier Awards, and two Evening Standard Awards for Best Musical and Best Opera.

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**E. LOREN MEEKER (UNITED STATES)**
*Associate Director*

For information about E. Loren Meeker, please see p. 53.

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**ROBERT ISRAEL (UNITED STATES)**
*Set Designer*

Robert Israel is a set and costume designer for both opera and theater. His work has been seen at HGO as set designer for *Fidelio* (2011), the original production of *Florencia en el Amazonas* (world premiere in 1996 and revival in 2001), and *Akhnaten* (with Richard Riddell, 1984); he also designed the costumes for *Akhnaten*. His work has been seen at the Lincoln Center Theater, the Metropolitan Opera, the National Operas in London and Tokyo, the Paris Opera, and in Vienna and many other international locations. Israel’s costume drawings are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and an Obie Award. Israel has designed the world premieres of four operas by Philip Glass and is the former chairman of the Theater Department at UCLA.
CATHERINE ZUBER
(UNITED STATES)
Costume Designer
Catherine Zuber’s work has been seen at HGO previously in Carousel (2016), Florencia en el Amazonas (world premiere in 1996 and revival in 2001), Salome (1997), and Annie Get Your Gun (1992). Her work on Broadway includes My Fair Lady, for which she won Tony, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle awards; she won Tony Awards for The King and I, South Pacific, The Coast of Utopia, The Light in the Piazza, Awake and Sing!, and The Royal Family. Other Broadway credits include Oslo, Junk, The Father, War Paint (Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle awards), Fiddler on the Roof, Golden Boy, Edward Albee’s Seascape, Gigi (Drama Desk Award), Doubt, and Dinner at Eight. For the Metropolitan Opera, she costumed The Barber of Seville, The Tales of Hoffmann, Comte Ory, The Elixir of Love, Otello, Dr. Atomic, and Roméo et Juliette. In 2016, she was inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame.

MARK MCCULLOUGH
(UNITED STATES)
Lighting Designer
Mark McCullough’s work has been seen at HGO in last season’s West Side Story and in Show Boat (2013); he also lit HGO’s concurrent production of The Pearl Fishers. Some of his most recent engagements include Dialogues of the Carmelites at Indiana University, West Side Story and The Cunning Little Vixen at the Glimmerglass Festival, Norma at the Opera Nacional de Chile, and La traviata with Washington National Opera. He has also designed lighting for the Vienna State Opera (Macbeth); Bolshoi Theatre (La traviata); the Metropolitan Opera (The Marriage of Figaro); the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) in Beijing (The Tales of Hoffmann); La Scala (Cyrano de Bergerac); Teatro Real (Luisa Miller); Opéra national du Rhin (The Beggar’s Opera); the Royal Opera, Covent Garden (The Queen of Spades); Opera North (Eugene Onegin); and numerous productions with Boston Lyric Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Los Angeles Opera, Washington National Opera, Dallas Opera, Glimmerglass Festival, Canadian Opera Company, New York City Opera, Seattle Opera, and San Francisco Opera, including the Ring cycle directed by Francesca Zambello. His successes in theater include the Broadway productions of Outside Mullingar, Jesus Christ Superstar (revival), After Ms. Julie, and The American Plan. International theater credits include Whistle Down the Wind (London); Der Besuch Der Alten Dame (Vienna); Artus (St. Gallen, Switzerland); Rebecca (St. Gallen and Stuttgart); and the U.K. tour of Jesus Christ Superstar.

S. KATY TUCKER
(UNITED STATES)
Projection/Video Designer
S. Katy Tucker, a video and projections designer based in New York City, made her HGO debut earlier this season with The Flying Dutchman. Tucker began her career as a painter and installation artist, exhibiting her work at a variety of galleries, such as the Corcoran Museum in Washington, D.C. and Artist’s Space in New York City. Her work in theater and opera has been seen around the world, including Broadway, Off-Broadway, the Metropolitan Opera, the Sydney Opera House, Carnegie Hall, the New York City Ballet, the Kennedy Center, Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), and The Park Avenue Armory, among others. Recent productions include Dmitri Tcherniakov’s production of Prince Igor at the Dutch National Opera and Metropolitan Opera, the Ring cycle with Francesca Zambello at San Francisco Opera, Iron & Coal with Kevin Newbury, If You Listen with R. B. Schlater, sets and video for Orphée at Banff Center with Joel Ivany, and West Side Story at the Kennedy Center with Francesca Zambello. Upcoming projects include Silent Voices with Kevin Newbury, the Park Avenue Armory Gala with Stefan Beckman, and Parsifal at Indiana University Opera Theater.

ERIC SEAN FOGEL
(UNITED STATES)
Choreographer
Eric Sean Fogel made his HGO debut as associate director of last season’s West Side Story; he is also the choreographer for HGO’s concurrent production of The Pearl Fishers. This season, his work can be seen in Porgy and Bess at Seattle Opera; Romeo and Juliet with the Shakespeare Theatre Company; The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me at Washington National Opera/ Kennedy Center; The Marriage of Figaro at Cincinnati Opera; and Show Boat at the Glimmerglass Festival. Fogel has enjoyed a nine-year collaboration with the Glimmerglass Festival, having choreographed over 20 operas, including the upcoming world premiere of Jeanine Tesori’s Blue. Fogel has also created new productions for Atlantic Theatre II, Opera Bordeaux, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago Opera Theatre, Dallas Opera, Hawaii Opera Theatre, Lyric Opera Kansas City, Los Angeles Opera, Opera Philadelphia, Théâtre du Capitole, and Washington National Opera.
of Players

performed in the world premieres of Carlisle Floyd's Mice and Men and Tod Machover's Wonderful Life at HGO include the world premieres of Ricky Ian Gordon's The Nutcracker for the Houston Ballet. An accomplished pianist, Bado appears regularly with Renée Fleming in recital, including a tour this past fall. He has also played for Cecilia Bartoli, Frederica von Stade, Susan Graham, Denyce Graves, Marcello Giordani, Ramón Vargas, Samuel Ramey, Jamie Barton, Ryan McKinny, and Nathan Gunn. Bado holds music degrees from the Eastman School of Music, where he received the 2000 Alumni Achievement Award, and West Virginia University, and he studied advanced choral conducting with Robert Shaw. For 12 years, he was the director of the opera studies program at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music. He has served on the faculties of the Aspen Music Festival and School, the Dolora Zajick Institute for Young Dramatic Voices, the International Vocal School in Moscow, and the Texas Music Institute. He received HGO's Silver Rose Award (2013) in honor of his 25th anniversary as chorus master.

Texas native Denise Tarrant began her professional violin career at the age of 16 with the Midland-Odessa (Texas) Symphony. Afterward she studied at the University of Houston, Rice University, Trinity University (London), and the Royal College of Music (London). She became HGO's concertmaster under the baton of Patrick Summers in 1999. Highlights of her work at HGO include the world premieres of Ricky Ian Gordon's The House without a Christmas Tree (2017), Jake Heggie's It's a Wonderful Life (2016), Carlisle Floyd's Cold Sassy Tree (2000) and Tod Machover's Resurrection (1999), as well as Floyd's Of Mice and Men (2002) and Catán's Florencia en el Amazonas (2001), all of which have been released on CD. She further performed in the world premieres of Carlisle Floyd's Prince of Players (2016); André Previn's Brief Encounter (2009); Heggie's Three Decembers (2008) and The End of the Affair (2004); Mark Adamo's Lysistrata (2005); Catán's Salsipuedes (2004); and Rachel Portman's The Little Prince (2003). She performed onstage as the solo violinist in Julius Caesar last season and also when the production debuted in 2003. She has been concertmaster of the Houston Ballet Orchestra since 1988 and has been featured as a violin soloist in numerous Houston Ballet productions including Stanton Welch's Maninyas (Ross Edward's Violin Concerto), Clear (Bach's Concerto for Violin and Oboe), The Four Seasons (Vivaldi), and Natalie Weir's Steppenwolf (Bruch Violin Concerto).

Grammy Award–winner Ana María Martínez was most recently seen at HGO this past September, when she and Plácido Domingo performed in a sold-out concert to welcome HGO audiences back to the Wortham Theater Center after displacement by Hurricane Harvey. The HGO Studio alumna (1994–95) returns to HGO regularly for such roles as Marguerite in Faust and the title role in Rusalka (2016); her first Cio-Cio-San in Madame Butterfly (2010, also 2015) and her first Carmen (2014), both of which have become signature roles; Rosina in The Barber of Seville (2011); Nedda in Pagliacci (2008); and numerous others including Rosalba in Florencia en el Amazonas (2001). Earlier this season, she sang Elisabetta in Don Carlo with the Los Angeles Opera and will return to the company later in the season as Solea in El gato montés opposite Plácido Domingo. She also will join the Vienna State Opera as Cio-Cio-San. Recent performances include the title role of Carmen with Los Angeles Opera; Rusalka with Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires; Lyric Opera of Chicago as both Fiordiligi in Così fan tutte and Marguerite in Faust; the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, as Alice Ford in Falstaff; Florida Grand Opera as the title role in Florencia en el Amazonas; and Santa Fe Opera as Cio-Cio-San. She regularly collaborates with Plácido Domingo on international multi-city concert tours, and has also been a frequent concert partner of classical crossover tenor Andrea Bocelli. She voiced the role of opera singer Alessandra in season three of Amazon’s Mozart in the Jungle.

HGO Studio alumna Alicia Gianni (2006–08) has enjoyed successes on both operatic and concert stages, including nominations for
Houston’s Best Jazz Vocalist in the Houston Press Music Awards. She won second prize and the Audience Choice Award in HGO’s 2006 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias and has been recently seen at HGO in performances of Giannetta in The Elixir of Love (2016–2017), Papagena in The Magic Flute (2015), Petra in A Little Night Music (2014), Beryl in the world premiere of Brief Encounter (2009), Musetta in performances of La bohème (2008), and Gretel in Hansel and Gretel (2006), among other roles. Other opera credits include Adina in The Elixir of Love for Opera Birmingham; Despina in Così fan tutte and Fortuna/Giunone in Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria with Wolf Trap Opera; and Fiordiligi in Così fan tutte, Countess Ceprano in Rigoletto, and the title role in a concert performance of Suor Angelica as part of the summer festival in Torre del Lago, Italy. She has recently done concerts for the American College of Surgeons in San Diego, Musical Bridges in San Antonio, Houston Ballet, Arizona Opera, and Opera Birmingham, and has sung performances with the Houston Symphony, River Oaks Chamber Orchestra, Palm Beach Symphony Orchestra, Florida West Coast Symphony, and the Hickory Choral Society and Orchestra. This year she released her jazz album Don’t Forget to Say Goodnight, for which she composed and co-produced all the songs.

**JOSHUA GUERRERO (UNITED STATES)**

Tenor—Arcadio

Grammy Award winner Joshua Guerrero is making his HGO debut. This season, he also made his Washington National Opera debut as Alfredo in a new production of La traviata and this spring he will return to the Canadian Opera Company as Rodolfo in La bohème. He was the tenor soloist in the Bel Canto Trio’s 70th anniversary tour, featuring rising young opera stars in the program originally toured by Mario Lanza, George London, and Frances Yeend. He recently made his Glyndebourne Festival Opera debut as Pinkerton in a new production of Madame Butterfly and returned to the Santa Fe Opera in the same role. He was seen as the Duke in Rigoletto for his debuts with the Canadian Opera Company and Michigan Opera Theatre, as well as his first performances of Edgardo in Lucia di Lammermoor at Florida Grand Opera. Guerrero returned to the Los Angeles Opera in his role debut as Macduff in Macbeth with Plácido Domingo as Macbeth and James Conlon conducting, which was released on Sony DVD. He debuted in the same role in Barrie Kosky’s production at the Zurich Opera with Gianandrea Noseda conducting and made his London debut at the English National Opera as the Duke of Mantua in Jonathan Miller’s famous production of Rigoletto. In concert, he toured Europe with Gustavo Dudamel and the Simón Bolívar Orchestra singing Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 and sang Haydn’s Creation with Dudamel and the L.A. Philharmonic. He made his Baltimore Symphony Orchestra debut with Marin Alsop in Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9.

**NORMAN GARRETT (UNITED STATES)**

Baritone—Riolo

Norman Garrett is making his HGO debut. This season, he returns to Washington National Opera as Lieutenant Gordon in Silent Night, debuts at the Bavarian State Opera as Larkens in La fanciulla del West, and performs Jochanaan in Salome with Dayton Opera and Crown in Porgy and Bess with Fort Worth Opera. High profile concert appearances include Carmina Burana with Bramwell Tovey and the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl as well as at the Toronto Symphony with Donald Runnicles. In recent seasons, Garrett has appeared numerous times with Washington National Opera, where he was a Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist. Performances there include Riolo, Papageno in The Magic Flute, Masetto in Don Giovanni, the Father in Hansel and Gretel, Steersman in Tristan und Isolde, Captain Gardiner in Jake Heggie’s Moby-Dick, and the world premiere of Jeanine Tesori’s The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me. Other operatic appearances include his Lyric Opera of Chicago debut as Jake in Porgy and Bess, the title role in Delius’s rarely heard Koanga with the Wexford Festival in Ireland, Escamillo in Carmen with both Austin Opera and Opera Columbus, Crown with the Glimmerglass Festival and the University of Michigan, Minskman in Jonathan Dove’s Flight at Des Moines Metro Opera, and Mandarino in Turandot with Cincinnati Opera.

**NANCY FABIOLA HERRERA (SPAIN)**

Mezzo-soprano—Paula

Nancy Fabiola Herrera is making her HGO debut. She received the Life Achievement Award in 2018 from Opera Actual magazine. Recent performances include her debut at Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires with L’italiana in Algeri, Léonor in La favorite in Spain, Herodias in Salome at the Metropolitan Opera, and Dalila in Samson et Dalila in Oviedo (Spain). She also has appeared as Paula in Florencia en el Amazonas with L.A. Opera and Washington Opera. Her portrayal of Carmen has won her immense acclaim and has brought her to a number of major opera houses, including the Metropolitan Opera; the Royal Opera, Covent Garden; Arena di Verona;
the Caracalla Opera Festival; and opera companies in Berlin, Munich, Dresden, Sydney, and Japan, among many others. Equally at home in the concert hall, she recently sang and recorded the role of Rosario in Granados’s Goyescas with the London BBC and Salud in Falla’s La vida breve with the Manchester BBC. Other recent engagements include Mahler’s 3rd Symphony, Das Lied von der Erde, and Kindertotenlieder; Berlioz’s Les nuits d’été and La mort de Cléopâtre, Ravel’s Schéhérazade, and the Verdi Requiem. Future engagements include the Verdi Requiem under the baton of Plácido Domingo, El gato montés with L.A. Opera, Giulietta in The Tales of Hoffmann in Beijing, and Dalila at Teatro Maestranza in Seville.

**THOMAS GLASS**
(UNITED STATES)
Harlan and Dian Stai Fellow
Baritone—Alvaro
Second-year HGO Studio artist
Thomas Glass performed Marcello in selected performances of La bohème earlier this season. Last season, his roles included Figaro in outdoor performances of The Barber of Seville, Fiorello in mainstage performances of The Barber of Seville, Officer Krupke in West Side Story, and Baron Douphol in La traviata. He is a former member of Minnesota Opera’s resident artist program, performing Capulet in Romeo and Juliet, Gustave in the world premiere of Dinner at Eight, and Schaunard in La bohème, and covering Mercutio in Romeo, Donner in Das Rheingold, and Dan Packard in Dinner at Eight. For Wolf Trap Opera, he sang Joseph in The Ghosts of Versailles and Bragherona in Gassmann’s L’opera seria, also covering the roles of Tarquinius in The Rape of Lucretia and Schaunard. He joined San Francisco Opera’s Merola program in the summer of 2017 and returned to Wolf Trap Opera this past summer as Mercutio in Roméo et Juliette. Upcoming engagements include Marcello at Des Moines Metro Opera.

**DAVID PITTSINGER**
(UNITED STATES)
Bass-baritone—Capitán
David Pittsinger, making his HGO debut, is well known for his work in opera as well as music theater. Engagements this season include the role of Méphistophélès in Opera Omaha’s new edition of Faust, which reconstructs Gounod’s earliest versions
of the work, and Seneca in *The Coronation of Poppea* at the Opera Theatre of St. Louis. He recently appeared as Palémon in *Thaïs* at the Metropolitan Opera, as well as Father Trulove in *The Rake’s Progress* with the Dutch National Opera; he sang the latter role also in a new production by Simon McBurney at the Aix-en-Provence Festival. He reprised his portrayal of Fred Graham in *Kiss Me, Kate*, at the Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg and sang the title role in *Man of La Mancha* at the Utah Opera and at the Ivoryton Playhouse. Other recent highlights include Metropolitan Opera appearances as Le Bret in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Luther/Crespel in *The Tales of Hoffmann*, and the Marquis de la Force in *Dialogues des Carmélites*; his role debut as Robert E. Lee/Edgar Ray Killen in Philip Glass’s *Appomattox* at Washington National Opera; his return to Portland Opera as Jochanaan in *Salome*, this production of *Florencia en el Amazonas* at L.A. Opera and Washington National Opera, where he also sang the Speaker in a new production of *The Magic Flute* conducted by Philippe Auguin; summer performances at the Glimmerglass Festival as King Arthur in *Camelot*; and a reprise of his Helen Hayes Award–nominated performance as Emile de Becque in Rodgers & Hammerstein’s *South Pacific* at the Riverside Theater in Vero Beach.
HOUSTON GRAND OPERA PRESENTS

THE PEARL FISHERS

An Opera in Three Acts | Music by Georges Bizet | Libretto by Michel Carré and Eugène Cormon

BROWN THEATER, WORTHAM THEATER CENTER
Sung in French with projected English translation
A production of San Diego Opera and Michigan Opera Theatre.

JAN. 25  JAN. 27M  FEB. 02  FEB. 05  FEB. 08

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The activities of Houston Grand Opera are supported in part by funds provided by the City of Houston and by a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts.
CAST (in order of vocal appearance)

Zurga: Mariusz Kwiecien
Nadir: Lawrence Brownlee
Leila: Andrea Carroll ✡
Nourabad: Federico De Michelis ✡

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Roderick Cox *
Director: E. Loren Meeker
Scenic and Costume Designer: Zandra Rhodes
Lighting Designer: Mark McCullough
Choreographer: Eric Sean Fogel
Chorus Master: Richard Bado ✡

Musical Preparation: Geoffrey Loff ✡
French Diction Coach: Audrey Saint-Gil *

CREATIVE TEAM (continued)

Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Supertitles called by: Meredith Morse

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Sets for The Pearl Fishers executed by San Diego Opera Scenic Studio.
Costumes for The Pearl Fishers executed by San Diego Opera Costume Shop.
Performing artists, stage directors, and choreographers are represented by the American Guild of Musical Artists, the union for opera professionals in the United States.
Scenic, costume, and lighting designers and assistant designers are represented by United Scenic Artists, I.A.T.S.E., Local USA-829.
Orchestral musicians are represented by the Houston Professional Musicians Association, Local #65-699, American Federation of Musicians.
Stage crew personnel provided by I.A.T.S.E., Local #51.
Wardrobe personnel provided by Theatrical Wardrobe Union, Local #896.
This production is being recorded for archival purposes.

SPECIAL CREDITS

Blazek & Vetterling LLP—Houston, Auditors
Apurva Thekdi, M.D., Consulting Physician and Otolaryngologist
Quan Law Group, PLLC
Immigration and Visa Attorneys

Vinson & Elkins, Attorneys of Record
Shweiki Media, Printer, Opera Cues

* HGO debut  † HGO Studio artist  ✡ Former HGO Studio artist
The Pearl Fishers

SYNOPSIS

The performance lasts 2 hours and 15 minutes, including one intermission.

ACT I
A PEARL-DIVING VILLAGE ON AN ISLAND IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

The shoreline is bustling with morning activity as the community prepares to honor the passing of their beloved leader. They dance to celebrate his life and to ward away evil spirits, which they believe will descend upon their island in the absence of a chief. Zurga tells them they must not delay in choosing a new leader. The villagers unanimously elect Zurga and swear loyalty to him. Nadir, an old friend of Zurga’s, returns to the village after spending several months away. Nadir and Zurga confess that the last time they saw each other, they had parted on uneasy terms—their friendship was almost destroyed when they both fell in love with Leïla, a beautiful priestess. Nadir swears he has kept the vow they both made to protect their friendship by staying away from her.

Nourabad, the high priest, brings a veiled priestess to the village—she is to watch over the island and protect the pearl divers from the demons of the deep. Zurga tells the priestess she must remain veiled and chaste throughout her vigil. If she does so, and if she succeeds in keeping the community safe, her reward will be their finest pearl. If she fails, she will be put to death. In an outburst, Nadir decries that punishment as too harsh. The veiled priestess—none other than Leïla herself—immediately recognizes Nadir, and despite Zurga’s ultimatum, she affirms her vows. Neither Zurga nor Nadir realizes she is the same priestess they fought over just months before.

Alone, Nadir recalls how he had met illicitly with Leïla after swearing to Zurga that he would not pursue her. Something about the priestess’s voice reminds him of Leïla, but he brushes aside that fantasy as he drifts off to sleep. The priestess appears and begins her incantation. Roused by her voice, Nadir no longer doubts her identity. He calls out to Leïla, she removes her veil, and he promises to defend her life and their love.

ACT II
THE TEMPLE

Nourabad tells Leïla that the divers have returned safely and she can now sleep until morning in the temple. He stresses the importance of her vows. As proof of her ability to keep her promises, she tells him how, as a girl, she once protected a fugitive. The young man she saved gave her a necklace that she wears to this day. As Leïla prepares for sleep, she daydreams about Nadir, who has, in fact, evaded the guards and is making his way into the sacred enclosure. The couple declare their love just as a storm breaks out. Nourabad discovers the lovers; Leïla forces Nadir to flee, but Nourabad’s guards drag him back. Nourabad insists that the storm was sent by the spirits as punishment for her breaking her vows, and the community prepares to sacrifice the lovers. Zurga stops them, declaring that Nadir and the priestess must be released. Outraged, Nourabad tears off Leïla’s veil. Zurga finally recognizes her. Jealous and outraged at Nadir’s betrayal, Zurga swears revenge.

INTERMISSION

ACT III
THE BEACH AFTER THE STORM

The storm has subsided, but the village has suffered terrible damage. Zurga regrets the rage and jealousy that made him condemn his best friend. Leïla intercedes on Nadir’s behalf, but Zurga’s jealousy is inflamed again when he realizes how much she loves his rival and he orders Nourabad to sacrifice her with Nadir. Before she is led off, Leïla produces her necklace, asking that it be sent to her mother. Zurga cries out as he recognizes the necklace.

The community prepares for the dual sacrifice. Just as the execution is to begin, Zurga interrupts with news that the town is on fire and exhorts the villagers to run back to the encampment and save their children and their homes. Zurga releases Nadir and Leïla and explains that he started the fire as a diversion. He reveals that he was the fugitive whom Leïla saved years ago—now he is repaying his debt. The lovers gratefully make their escape, and Zurga is left to face the consequences of his actions.

HGO PERFORMANCE HISTORY

This is the house debut of Bizet’s *The Pearl Fishers*. Among the repertoire HGO has not previously performed, *The Pearl Fishers* has been the most frequently requested.
At HGO performances, the excellent natural acoustics of the theaters in the Wortham Theater Center are relied upon to convey sound from the stage and pit. Electronic sound enhancement is used only with spoken dialogue (as in The Merry Widow), in musicals (as in A Little Night Music), in sound effects (thunder), and at the composer's direction (as in Nixon in China and The Little Prince). Visible microphones are positioned to record performances for archival purposes.

* HGO Orchestra core musician  † HGO Orchestra core musician on leave this production  ‡ HGO Studio artist
HOUSTON GRAND OPERA
CHORUS

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

Ofelia Adame
Geordie Alexander
Dennis Arrowsmith
Stephen Ash
G. Leslie Biffle
Christopher Childress
Patrick Contreras
Sybil Elizabeth Crawford
Callie Jo Denbigh
Justin Dunkle
Ashly Evans
Suzanne Gregory
Marvin Henderson
Frankie Hickman
Julie Hoeltzel
Jon Janacek
Joe Key
Kirsten Lutz Koerner
Wesley Landry
Katie Loff
Lindsay Lymer
Sarah Lysiak
Alejandro Magallón
Alisa Magallón
Keenan Manceaux
Kathleen Manley
Heath Martin
Neal Martinez
Norman Lee Mathews
Katherine McDaniel
Jeff Monette
Natasha Monette
Casey Jones Parrish
Cristino Perez
Ardeen Pierre
Abby Powell
Nicholas Rathgeb
Gabrielle Reed
Kendall Reimer
Kathleen Ruhleder
Christina Scanlan
Kade I. Smith
John Stevens
Lauren Stocker
Denise Ward
John Weinel
Jennifer Wright
Patrick Wright

DANCERS

Edward DeShane
LaRodney Freeman
Tasha Heggem
Rachael Hutto
Saliya Ilankoon, Consulting Artist Regarding Kandyan Dance
Brittany Jones
Alison Mixon
Emily Roy-Sayre
Donald Sayre

SUPERNUMERARIES

Troy Faldyn
Luke Fedell
Matthew Jamison
Austin Jones
Orlanders Jones
Christopher Shroff
Terrance Simon
Miguel Stonecipher
RODERICK COX
(UNITED STATES)
Conductor
Roderick Cox is making his HGO debut and his opera debut with these performances. Winner of the 2018 Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award, Cox was named the Minnesota Orchestra’s associate conductor in September 2016 for a two-year period after serving as the ensemble’s assistant conductor. Before arriving in Minnesota, he served for two years as assistant conductor of the Alabama Symphony Orchestra and music director of the Alabama Symphony Youth Orchestra. He was awarded the Robert J. Harth Conducting Prize by the Aspen Music Festival in 2013, which led to national recognition and a return to the Festival as a fellow. He has also held fellowships with the Chicago Sinfonietta as part of its Project Inclusion program and the Chautauqua Music Festival, where he was a David Effron Conducting Fellow. Highlights among recent engagements included a subscription concert debut with the Minnesota Orchestra and debut concerts with the Cleveland Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, and Santa Fe Symphony orchestras as well as at the Lanaudière Festival with the Orchestre Métropolitain de Montréal and at Grant Park Festival in Chicago. Cox also conducted a performance sponsored by Google and the Colour of Music Festival for the opening of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington D.C. Earlier this season, Cox made his debut performance in a subscription concert with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra with Cameron Carpenter and at the Manhattan School of Music conducting Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9.

E. LOREN MEEKER
(UNITED STATES)
Director
E. Loren Meeker is making her HGO mainstage directorial debut after previously working on The Queen of Spades (2010) as assistant director; The Marriage of Figaro (2005) and Don Giovanni (2006) as choreographer and assistant director; and The Marriage of Figaro (2011), Show Boat (2013), and the concurrent production of Florencia en el Amazonas as associate director. Her HGO projects as director include a special production of Trial by Jury at the 1910 Harris County Courthouse (2013), HGO Studio Showcase 2013–14, plus the HGOCO world premieres of A Way Home (2010), From My Mother’s Mother (2012), Past the Checkpoints (2013), and River of Light (2014). She recently directed four productions with New Orleans Opera Association—Lucia di Lammermoor, Die Fledermaus, Faust, and Turandot—and won the Gambit Best of Opera Award for Die Fledermaus and Faust. She has received critical acclaim for recent productions of The Cunning Little Vixen (Glimmerglass Festival), The Daughter of the Regiment (Atlanta Opera), Rigoletto and Die Fledermaus (Lyric Opera of Chicago), Carmen (Washington National Opera and Madison Opera), Die Fledermaus (San Francisco Opera), La pietra del paragone (Wolf Trap Opera), La bohème (Glimmerglass Festival and Opera San Antonio), The Barber of Seville (Opera San Antonio), Manon Lescaut (Singapore Lyric Opera), and Manon (Teatro Colón). Upcoming directorial engagements include Susannah (Rice University), Lobengrin (Opera Southwest), Show Boat (Glimmerglass Festival), Tosca (Opera San Antonio), and Madame Butterfly (Portland Opera). She was recently appointed co-artistic director at Opera San Antonio.

ZANDRA RHODES
(UNITED KINGDOM/UNITED STATES)
Scenic and Costume Designer
Fashion designer Zandra Rhodes’s work in opera has been previously seen at HGO in Aida (2013, 2007). She was born in the United Kingdom and was introduced to the world of fashion by her mother, a fitter for the Paris fashion House of Worth. Rhodes’s major area of study was printed textile design; she made dresses from her own unique fabrics and pioneered the use of printed textiles as an intrinsic part of the garments she created. In 1969, she took her collection to New York, where it was featured in Vogue, and became one of the new wave of British designers who put London at the forefront of the international fashion scene in the 1970s. Notable past clients include Diana, Princess of Wales; Jackie Onassis; Elizabeth Taylor; Joan Rivers; and Freddie Mercury. Current clients include HRH Princess Michael of Kent, Debbie Harry, Bianca Jagger, Kylie Minogue, Anastasia, and Paris Hilton. Rhodes began her work in opera by designing costumes for The Magic Flute for San Diego Opera and followed by designing both sets and costumes for this production of The Pearl Fishers, again for San Diego Opera. This production has been seen at San Francisco Opera, Seattle Opera, New York City Opera, Washington National Opera, Opéra de Montréal, Minnesota Opera, Opera Colorado, Pittsburgh Opera, Tulsa Opera, and Michigan Opera. Rhodes was made a Commander of the British Empire in 1997 in recognition of her contribution to fashion and textiles and has been
awarded nine honorary doctoral degrees. She served as chancellor for the University for the Creative Arts in the U.K. from 2010 to 2018.

MARK MCCULLOUGH (UNITED STATES)
Lighting Designer
For information about Mark McCullough, please see p. 43.

ERIC SEAN FOGEL (UNITED STATES)
Choreographer
For information about Eric Sean Fogel, please see p. 43.

RICHARD BADO (UNITED STATES)
Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair
Chorus Master
For information about Richard Bado, please see p. 44.

DENISE TARRANT (UNITED STATES)
Sarah and Ernest Butler Concertmaster Chair
Concertmaster
For information about Denise Tarrant, please see p. 44.

LAWRENCE BROWNLEE (UNITED STATES)
Tenor—Nadir
Lawrence Brownlee is making his role debut as Nadir. He has been seen at HGO previously in The Abduction from the Seraglio (2017), Lindoro in The Italian Girl in Algiers (2012), Count Almaviva in The Barber of Seville (2011), and Don Ramiro in La Cenerentola (2007). Named the 2017 Male Singer of the Year by both the International Opera Awards and Bachtrack, Brownlee not only keeps an active performance schedule but also serves as artistic advisor at Opera Philadelphia, helping the company to expand its repertoire and aiding in diversity efforts and community initiatives. He began this season with two evenings of duets with bass-baritone Eric Owens hosted by the Cliburn, followed by a night of arias at

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Amsterdam’s famed Concertgebouw. He will sing his first performances of Ilo in Rossini’s Zelmira with Washington Concert Opera and return to Opéra national de Paris for La Cenerentola, to Zurich Opera and Deutsche Oper Berlin for La sonnambula, and to Opéra Royal de Wallonie-Liège for I puritani. His season also features a 17-stop U.S. tour with Eric Owens and a performance at Carnegie Hall in March 2019 with Jason Moran and Alicia Hall Moran as part of Migrations: The Making of America—A Citywide Festival. Recent highlights included returns to the Royal Opera, Covent Garden; Zurich Opera; Lyric Opera of Chicago; Bavarian State Opera; and Opéra national de Paris; as well as the world premiere and recital tour of Cycles of My Being, a new song cycle that centers on what it means to be an African American man living in America today.

MARIUSZ KWIECIEŃ
(Poland/United States)
Baritone—Zurga

Mariusz Kwiecien sang the title role in Don Giovanni, one of his signature roles, for his HGO debut in 2006. He performs with the Metropolitan Opera; the Royal Opera, Covent Garden; Paris Opera; Vienna State Opera; Lyric Opera of Chicago; Bavarian State Opera; and with many other renowned theaters around the world. He is in demand for his portrayals of the title roles in Don Giovanni, King Roger, and Eugene Onegin, as well as for Almaviva in The Marriage of Figaro, Malatesta in Don Pasquale, Riccardo in I puritani, and Rodrigo di Posa in Don Carlo. Zurga in The Pearl Fishers is another frequent role, which he first sang at Teatro Real in Madrid. This season opened with performances of Riccardo in I puritani with the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona; he will reprise Zurga in the spring with Bilbao Opera. Later this season he sings Malatesta in Don Pasquale with the Opéra national de Paris; he returns to the Bavarian State Opera as Count Almaviva in The Marriage of Figaro, and appears as the title role in Eugene Onegin in Warsaw and Matsumoto. Bookending last season were engagements with the Royal Opera, Covent Garden: to begin, Marcello in a highly anticipated new production of La bohème, and ending the season in the title role in Don Giovanni. He also returned to the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Zurga, the Vienna State Opera as Eugene Onegin, and the Bavarian State Opera as Enrico in Lucia di Lammermoor.

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ANDREA CARROLL
(UNITED STATES)
Soprano—Leïla
HGO Studio alumna Andrea Carroll (2012–14) won first prize and the Audience Choice Award in HGO’s 2012 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. She is currently an ensemble member of the Vienna State Opera, where this season she performs Norina in Don Pasquale, Adina in The Elixir of Love, and Kitty in the world premiere of Die Weiden by Johannes Maria Staud. She will also appear in Die Frau ohne Schatten in Vienna and will reprise the role of Adina in Oslo, Norway. She returns regularly to HGO, most recently as Maria in West Side Story; she has also been seen at HGO as Woglinde in both Das Rheingold (2014) and Götterdämmerung (2017), Mary Hatch Bailey in the world premiere of It’s a Wonderful Life and Julie Jordan in Carousel (both 2016), and many others. Recent engagements include Susanna in The Marriage of Figaro, Zerlina in Don Giovanni, and Adina in Vienna; Micaëla in Carmen with Opera San Antonio; Gilda in Rigoletto with Palm Beach Opera; and Mélisande in Debussy’s Pelléas et Mélisande with Garsington Opera. In her first season as a Vienna State Opera ensemble member, she performed over 25 roles. She made her Washington National Opera debut as Rosalba in Florencia en el Amazonas, followed by her first performances of Gilda in Rigoletto with Opera Santa Barbara. She sang the role of the Princess in El gato con botas with Gotham Chamber Opera, Echo in Ariadne auf Naxos at Seattle Opera, and Leïla in The Pearl Fishers in a return to Utah Opera.

FEDERICO DE MICHELIS
(ARGENTINA)
Bass-baritone—Nourabad
Argentinian bass-baritone Federico De Michelis, a recent graduate of the HGO Studio (2015–17), has been seen at HGO as Colline in La bohème earlier this season, Achillas in Julius Caesar (2017); selected performances of Dulcamara in The Elixir of Love, Thomas Betterton in the world premiere of Carlisle Floyd’s Prince of Players, and Antonio in The Marriage of Figaro (all in 2016); and performances of Angelotti in Tosca, Zaretsky in Eugene Onegin, and the King in The Little Prince (all in 2015). He was previously a member of the Opera Studio of Teatro Argentino de La Plata and a student at the Escuela Superior de Música Reina Sofia in Madrid. In the current season, he will reprise the role of Nourabad in The Pearl Fishers for his debut with the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona and will debut with the North Carolina Symphony in the Mozart Mass in C Minor. Recent performances include his debut with Palm Beach Opera as the title role in The Marriage of Figaro; his Philadelphia Orchestra debut performing Sciarone in Tosca under the baton of Yannick Nézet-Séguin; a series of concerts in Key West, Florida, as part of the Florida Keys Concert Association; Brander in La damnation de Faust with Aspen Music Festival; and Mr. Flint and Timur in Billy Budd and Turandot, respectively, with Des Moines Metro Opera.
Save the dates

JANUARY 18–FEBRUARY 5, 2019
Volunteer at the Opera Boutique, before and during intermissions of Florencia en el Amazonas and The Pearl Fishers. Be a cashier, assist customers with their purchases, and help set up before performances. While working at the boutique, volunteers receive a 15% discount on full-price items and a ticket to a dress rehearsal after 2 volunteer shifts. Guild members receive a 10% discount on purchases from the boutique at any time.

FEBRUARY 12, 2019
Visit an HGO Guild Board meeting. Guild members are always welcome at monthly board meetings. Find out more about Guild activities, suggest new programs, and meet board members who work with various programs.

APRIL 2, 2019
Join us at Opera Night Live: this informative presentation features an artist from Don Giovanni and performances by HGO Studio members. Everyone is welcome. Reservations recommended.

APRIL 6, 2019
Spring Event: Join the Guild in celebration as we raise funds for the Guild’s award-winning education programs for students and community organizations in the greater Houston area. The spring event will take place at the Houston Racquet Club. Volunteers are needed for planning, securing auction items, decorating, and working the check-out stations. Reservations recommended.

COMING SOON—OUR NEW WEBSITE!
Completely redesigned! Easier to use! Want information about events or volunteer opportunities? Find it at hgoguild.org.

Let’s make beautiful music together!

Volunteer, gain new friendships, learn more about opera, make a difference, and discover a new side of yourself!

For more information on Guild activities, visit hgoguild.org, email guild@hgo.org, or call 713-546-0269.

Guild Underwriters: Penny Prater, Donald and Ruth Corman
Sustaining Members: Lannis Kirkland and Mary Ann Shemdin
UNSUNG HEROES

DENISE SIMON

BY PERRYN LEECH
Managing Director
Sarah and Ernest Butler Chair
PERRYN LEECH: You are a native Houstonian, but your parents came from Louisiana, didn’t they?
DENISE SIMON: Yes and no. My mother is from Baton Rouge and my dad’s parents are from Opelousas. I recently did a DNA test and found there to be quite the mix, to say the least!

It always throws up interesting insights into who we are and where we come from! So tell me about your schools and your siblings.
I have an older sister and a younger brother, and we were often the only kids of color in our schools. At elementary school, there were only six of us in the whole school, so we kind of stood out! We saw things while we were at school that stay with you—we witnessed two cross burnings. I also remember the death of JFK and especially when Martin Luther King Jr. died. The black kids were all sent home early, together.

Did you and your siblings enjoy school, or did the fact that you were “different” impact how you felt about school?
It was a challenge, but when I went to Cullen Junior High, I felt that I fit in. The school had mainly black students, and I enjoyed it. I followed my sister as a cheerleader, but the school was strict. We still had a paddle as a part of the punishments that could be—and occasionally were—administered. I was a good, if quiet, student and therefore I never had to worry about that.

Tell me about where you decided to go to college.
I attended U of H and majored in communications. I decided that I wanted to be a DJ. This was around the time of Watergate and I thought that it would be the right course for me. But after a year, I really wasn’t enjoying it, and I was thinking of quitting.

So did you?
I carried on with school but started to work for Southwestern Bell designing systems. It was during Affirmative Action, and I was very attractive to them as I was young, female, and black so I ticked a lot of boxes. I did that job for ten and a half years, but it never felt like it was really the job for me. The work was always very physical and hot.

Denise Simon is a native Houstonian who makes amazing things happen from behind the scenes as the special events operations manager. She is the longest-serving member of HGO’s special events team and spoke with Perryn Leech about the journey that ultimately led her to the very special place that is HGO.
Wow—so you didn’t really like it but still lasted for over 10 years...

Well, I had my family to think about. We do things we don’t enjoy to ensure those we love are taken care of. When Southwestern Bell divested, I decided to take the voluntary termination package.

What was the big plan after working for the same company for so long?

I decided that I was going to go to NYC to work. My children were in fourth and fifth grades and I guess I thought it would be a different experience. It was—but not in a way I had hoped. I sent the kids back to Texas quite quickly. I stayed and worked but it really wasn’t the right place for me. I returned to Houston after a year. When a job opened up at Foley’s department store in the buying office, I knew it was the job that would help me resettle back home. It was Guyla [Guyla Pircher, HGO’s late director of special events] who hired me to work as her administrative assistant in the buying office.

Was it good to be back?

It was, and Guyla and I hit it off immediately. She left Foley’s and went to work for the French retailer, Auchan Hypermarket. After a few months, she called me to join her. We worked there for about eight years. It was a great time and we loved working together.

So coming to HGO from there isn’t an obvious move…!

I still had a couple of more moves to make before coming to HGO. I left and went to work for Best Buy as a merchandise manager for five years. From there, I worked as an assistant store manager for Michael’s. It was there that I realized I was not really cut out for retail anymore, so when Guyla called me from her new job at HGO it was a pretty easy decision, really.

I guess that Guyla had just arrived and was starting to build her team?

That’s right. I believe she was here a year before I got here, and I was very happy to come and join her again. We built something very special, and since we lost Guyla, we have continued to build the team into a really strong unit. I have loved working at HGO mainly because of the truly fantastic colleagues and chairs that I spend time with. Having been in the corporate world and in sales most of my life, I can say that HGO is a very special place indeed.
A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

OPERA TO GO!

BY JIM TOWNSEND
Development Communications Manager

7:30 A.M. ▶ A handful of talented young opera singers—the intrepid performers of the touring group Opera to Go!—wake up and enter a brand-new destination into the Google Maps app on their phones. They’re off like racehorses to some remote part of the Greater Houston area—often to some place where opera has never been before.

7:45 A.M. ▶ Each singer does a mad dash to get coffee from a drive-through, getting funny looks from other drivers as they do vocal warm-ups in their cars.

8:30 A.M. ▶ A brightly decorated van rolls into the school parking lot. Five singers, a stage manager, and a pianist grab set pieces, costumes, and props from the back and hustle them inside.

8:45 A.M. ▶ The team comes together in a cafeteria and creates a vibrant fairytale world in a matter of minutes.

9:00 A.M. ▶ Students begin to file in to the cafeteria. Teachers herd them to their spots, reminding them to be quiet. They sit cross-legged and squirming on the gym floor, with their fingers pressed to their lips. The students’ excitement can barely be contained!

9:15 A.M. ▶ All eyes are glued to the stage. The whispering and giggling ceases, as hundreds of newly formed opera fans enjoy Mary Carol Warwick and Kate Pogue’s Cinderella in Spain.
“OPERA TO GO! is much fun, a little wild, and deeply gratifying,” says soprano Julia Fox, an Opera to Go! veteran performer who sings the role of Cinderella. “The tour keeps me in touch with our higher calling as artists: we never know who may be experiencing the power and delight of opera for the very first time, so we’re making the magic of opera happen no matter what.”

Houstonians are lucky. With more theater seats than any urban area in the United States (outside of Broadway) and world-class resident organizations in opera, ballet, symphony orchestra, theater, popular music, and more, we have one of the most vibrant performing arts centers in the world.

So every child in the Greater Houston area should get to experience the life-changing power of the performing arts, right?

The bad news is that it doesn’t exactly happen like that. Because of massive budget cuts to arts education and an increased emphasis on standardized testing, field trips and music lessons are going the way of the dodo bird.

Here’s the good news, though: by supporting HGO, you are already part of the solution.

Thanks to our incredible donors, Opera to Go! will touch the lives of more than 55,000 students this season—many of whom will be seeing a live performance for the first time in their young lives. In 180 performances, Opera to Go! will visit schools, libraries, retirement communities, hospitals, and community centers, bringing the magic out of the opera house and into the community.

Early exposure to the arts can have a powerful impact. Just ask HGO Board member Benjamin Fink, CEO of Western Gas and CFO of Anadarko Petroleum Corporation, a major supporter of HGOco’s arts education programs.

“Almost every singer I’ve ever met said that they were inspired at a young age,” Ben says. “It’s discouraging that, due to budget cuts in public schools, arts education is becoming a privilege of the few. It’s incumbent on organizations like HGO to fill that void.”

Ben is proud to host an annual HGO “Lunch ’n’ Learn” at Anadarko headquarters, and he and his wife, Jen, sponsor Opera to Go! at their daughter’s elementary school. “I’ve gotten nothing but joy out of Opera to Go! The kids love it, and they’re exposed to something they wouldn’t be exposed to otherwise,” he says.

The kids who are experiencing Opera to Go! at an elementary school near you this week don’t know the research. They don’t know that students who engage with the arts show 15 percent higher pass rates on standardized tests, exhibit fewer discipline problems, and have higher attendance. They don’t know that the arts make them half as likely to drop out of school and twice as likely to attend college. They’re not thinking about building their communication, collaboration, and creative problem-solving skills.

They just know that this show is a lot of fun.

“The group does such a great job of connecting to the audience. I very much enjoy watching the children’s reactions. Recently, I was reminded that this first-time reaction is an affirmation of the reason we get involved in the arts, and give so much. Thank you for sharing HGO’s time with our community.”

—TRICIA HOWARD
THE WOODLANDS ARTS COUNCIL
To find out how you can help sponsor education programs like Opera to Go!, or even bring the troupe to your children’s school, contact Christine Stevens at 713-546-0235 or cstevens@hgo.org.

Sometimes this group will do three shows in a day. Sometimes they’ll venture far outside of Houston, bringing the van to rural areas in “arts deserts,” where school groups will gather in places like Midland and Fayetteville. It’s a true calling that involves fast costume changes and a lot of travel. It can be exhausting, but it is worth it.

“Seeing the pure joy that opera brings to children and adults of all ages has taught me a new appreciation for what we all can do as artists,” says HGO Chorus member and Opera to Go! performer Christina Scanlan. “Opera really is for everyone!”

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“Our campus continues to buzz with excitement and I’m sure it will be on their minds for some time. Thank you for making a lasting, positive impression on our students and staff.”

—CHONDA REHBEIN
MUSIC TEACHER, SAN JACINTO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
CONROE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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**OPERATION TO GO! PRESENTS**

**THE ELIXIR OF LOVE**

Performances are on sale now!
On tour through May 17.
Bring Opera to Go! to your community!

HGO.org/theelixiroflife
HGOco is HGO’s broad initiative for connecting the company with the community in which we live. Among HGOco’s many projects, it offers programs for children ranging from Storybook Opera (Pre-K–Grade 2) to Opera Camps for students of various ages and interests.

**SCHOOL IN THE 21ST CENTURY** is a world full of tests and assessments, grades and ratings, data and reports. Recess is shorter, schools days are longer, and teachers are overwhelmed.

Traditionally, when opera companies look at this environment, their answer is to invite schools to come and see their art firsthand. This past November, HGO successfully held three student-attended performances of *La bohème* with nearly 6,000 students in the audience. But we also know we can do more, i.e., practice our art side by side with students, engage their creativity in meaningful ways, and empower them to use music to make their voices heard.

Enter the teaching artists. In the storm of school culture, there is a ray of sunlight, beaming with creativity and joy—the artists who use their talents to bring art into classrooms and to address social issues through the lens of their craft.

With the incorporation of teaching artists, HGOco has embarked on a series of “opera immersion” residencies that bring opera into the classroom and school culture.

Most often, these residencies consist of two teaching artists from HGOco, classroom teachers, and an entire grade level of students. A trip to the Wortham Theater Center to see a student matinee plus a visit from Opera to Go! to their own campus rounds out their “immersion” experience. The goal is to create artistically engaged students and teachers. The effect? A culture of creativity and critical thinking.

Last year, HGOco used the opera immersion model with teaching artist Alejandro Magallón, a Mexican-born tenor and member of the HGO Chorus since 2006, at Missouri City Middle School. The project was to create a civil rights movement operatic showcase based on Christopher Paul Curtis’s book *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*. Students recreated the chapters into song, dialogue into arias, and themes into choruses.

Magallón also led a residency at HISD elementary school Wharton Dual Language Academy to create an opera and bring it to life in Spanish. Magallón, along with fellow bilingual teaching artist Yamel Rizk, helped fifth-grade students transform Thanhha Lai’s book *Inside Out and Back Again* into their own Spanish version, layered in song. Spanning 12 sessions, the residency consisted of 3 classroom teachers, 75 students, and 24 classroom hours—and was conducted entirely in Spanish. Students discussed difficult themes from the book, such as fleeing a war-torn country, seeking asylum, and entering the United States as a refugee. Basing their melodies on the moods and emotions of the characters in the book, students composed songs for their class to sing.

Most importantly, the students were able to create something they cared about while understanding and empathizing with the experiences of vulnerable people around the world.

“These kids come from all sorts of backgrounds, but many don’t know the danger kids around the world face day in and day out, says Magallón. “Reading stories in class is a good start to understanding, but creating music to tell those stories really makes it hit home.”

The residency culminated in a performance for students, teachers, staff, and parents. Wharton Principal Jennifer Day and arts integration coordinator Patricia Selin had this to say about the residency: “The opportunity…to integrate both reading and language arts objectives with fine arts objectives (music, theater, and visual) is an invaluable one. Being a 100% dual language school, it is especially exciting to have native Spanish speaking teaching artists and the chance for our students to use their Spanish in an authentic way!”

HGOco books residencies throughout the year. Telephone 713-546-0215 to discuss what an opera immersion residency would look like in your school or community.
MEET DAMIEN SNEED

HGOco Director
Carleen Graham interviews HGOco’s new music director and composer-in-residence.

Where are you from and how did you become interested in music?
I’m originally from Augusta, Georgia, but have spent many years in New York City. Music was always part of my cultural upbringing. When I was about three years old, I would watch TV and play along on my toy piano—my mom started piano lessons for me when I was four years old. Jessye Norman sang at my parents’ wedding and has been an important mentor throughout my life.

What drew you to the world of opera?
In high school, I played piano for singers, in the orchestra, and in the jazz ensemble, and sang in the chorus. During my freshman year in college, a graduate student gave me a score to an opera I had never heard of—*Treemonisha*. When I watched the 1982 video of the opera produced by HGO, on the cover was Carmen Balthrop—the same Ms. Balthrop whose voice studio I had been playing for all year at Howard.

What project will you be working on for HGOco?
I’m extremely excited and humbled to work on a new chamber opera about the late Marian Anderson in collaboration with Deborah Mouton, the poet laureate of Houston. I approach this project with a great deal of reverence, because Ms. Anderson was such an important figure—not only to African American artists, but also to women. What she had to go through, what she stood for, and what she represents is truly inspiring.

You performed in Aretha Franklin’s memorial service in August. Will you share a bit about your relationship with her?
One day, the phone rang and it was Ms. Franklin! We shared the same publicist and she called to see if I would give her classical piano lessons. After that, she hired me to play in her band for her last West Coast tour. I spent a few years with her on the road and she would often call me just to talk. It was an honor to play during her memorial service and surreal that I was able to work with such a major singer, songwriter, musician, icon, and mogul who spanned many generations and approached so many musical styles with integrity.

HGOco FUNDERS

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HGOco programs, including Student Performances and HGO’s performances at Miller Outdoor Theatre, are supported through the NEXUS Initiative, which is made possible by:

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The activities of Houston Grand Opera are supported in part by funds provided by the City of Houston and by a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts.
Studio Artists Know the Score

This winter’s productions of *Florencia en el Amazonas* and *The Pearl Fishers* don’t include many HGO Studio artists onstage, but these pieces are rich with opportunities for the singers to study behind-the-scenes, working alongside the company’s music staff, the Studio faculty, and mainstage artists to develop their own interpretation and understanding of roles they are likely to perform in the future. They have spent the last month buried in scores, observing rehearsals, singing these operas in coachings and voice lessons, working on the text with their language teachers, and more. Most of the nine singers in the Studio are studying or performing a role in one of these two operas, and by the time you’ll read this, they’ll be fully memorized and ready to perform, whether the need is now or in the future.

Preparing a role is a huge part of a singer’s life. It is not uncommon for a professional singer to be learning a new role or reviewing a previous role for future performances while in the midst of performing another role. In many cases, they’re working in multiple languages at the same time and refining their singing in different styles of music. Singers must budget the time, energy, and vocal resources they can spend on future projects while saving what they need to give 100% to the audience in the current role. Learning to budget time and balance demands is a critical element of Studio artists’ growth during their time at HGO.

For many singers, cracking open a new score is a moment of excitement, inspiration, and discovery—and each singer has his or her own process in approaching it. Some begin by organizing it with highlighters, tabs, and other tools to get a sense of the structure of the opera and their role. Others dive right in, reading through the libretto and translating the text word-by-word to gain an understanding of the role’s intricacies and the details hidden in the score. Some start at the end of the opera and work backward until the role is learned and memorized, while others prefer to work in order from the beginning. In operas with recitative, singers must devote a significant amount of time to simply repeating text until it feels as natural and easy as having a conversation in real life.

We encourage singers to begin with text and move to music when the text has been internalized, as opera is about expressing text through the musical ideas of the composer. One cannot sing well until it is easy to speak the text. Fortunately, with the language training given to our singers, they become comfortable with the text fairly quickly and begin to coach their roles musically. A singer spends significant time with a pianist, singing through their role, building memory, and rehearsing until they are consistent. Studio artists typically sing their roles in voice lessons, as well, and often work through dramatic ideas with our acting and movement faculty. They work on their understanding and pronunciation of text with the same language teachers who teach them to speak the language conversationally. As they progress, this process is refined. By the time they leave the Studio, we hope they have found what consistently works for them. In the future, they’ll be on their own to prepare for engagements with a team of coaches and teachers they choose, so discovering their own process is very important.

Each mainstage singer at HGO goes through a similar process to prepare. In some cases, our visiting artists are singing their roles for the first time, and must go through this process in the very same way a Studio artist studies a new role; even if they have previously performed it, they still have to review and add depth to their interpretation. Either way, a tremendous amount of study and work happens privately, before the first day of rehearsal begins. Once singers begin rehearsal, their scores are generally set aside while they stage the opera and referred to only briefly for review.

As you enjoy performances of these two great operas, take note of the mountain that the singers have climbed to prepare for this day. It is detailed, challenging, and rewarding work, and that work is a big part of the everyday life of a singer.

—Brian Speck, HGO Studio Director
FEB. 1 | CONCERT OF ARIAS
Join us for the exciting final round of the 31st Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers. Champagne reception at 6 p.m.; competition at 7 p.m. in the Wortham Center's Cullen Theater. Celebration Dinner to follow in the Grand Foyer. For information, contact Brooke Rogers at 713-546-0271 or brogers@hgo.org.

FEB. 15 & 16 | HGO STUDIO RECITAL SERIES
HGO Studio artists perform at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Audrey Jones Beck Building, 5601 Main Street, 7:30 p.m. Purchase tickets online at HGO.org or by phone at 713-228-6737.
HGO and presenting underwriter Margaret Alkek Williams presented a historic concert on September 26, featuring international mega-star Plácido Domingo and beloved soprano Ana María Martínez and the HGO Orchestra, led by Patrick Summers. Fittingly titled HGO & Plácido—Coming Home!, the occasion marked HGO’s triumphant return to the Wortham Theater Center following last year’s Harvey devastation—and welcomed Domingo back to Houston more than 30 years after he opened the Wortham starring as Radames in Aida. Managing Director Perryn Leech and new HGO Board Chair Janet Carrig welcomed the 2,400-member audience with a jubilant “Honey, we’re home!,” and city officials joined Leech on stage with Mayor Sylvester Turner to proclaim September 26 as Wortham Theater Center day. Following a 15-minute encore and standing ovation, revelers (including former HGO General Director David Gockley) made their way to a festive dinner starring an 11-piece mariachi band (a nod to Domingo’s Mexican roots) and a four-course dinner featuring the flavors of Spain (Domingo’s birthplace). Thousands of red roses reflected the red velvet seats of the Wortham. Patrick Summers gave heartfelt gratitude to the evening’s artists who “sang us home” and acknowledged HGO’s “Harvey Heroes.” The concert and dinner raised over $1.5 million to benefit HGO’s post-Hurricane Harvey efforts to create thrilling art for the community.
Each year, hundreds of singers from across the globe audition for the HGO Studio, one of the world’s most prestigious young artist training programs. Concert of Arias brings the best of these future opera stars to Houston for the live finals of the competition. On an evening of soul-stirring music that will leave you breathless, enjoy some of the most powerful arias in the opera repertoire—and cast your vote for the Audience Choice Award. Following the announcement of winners, we celebrate the artists and the future of the art over a black-tie dinner in the Wortham’s Grand Foyer.

For table, ticket, and underwriting information, contact Brooke Rogers, 713-546-0271 or brogers@hgo.org.

HGO.ORG/CONCERTOFARIAS
On October 19, HGO sailed into its 64th season with a new production of Wagner’s The Flying Dutchman directed by Tomer Zvulun and celebrated at a late-night dinner. The event was chaired by Anne and Albert Chao and honored Molly and Jim Crownover. Board member Fred Griffin kicked off the evening from the orchestra pit as guest conductor leading the National Anthem, an Opening Night tradition. Once the stormy drama calmed and curtains closed, over 330 guests made their way in a light drizzle across Texas Avenue to the Ballroom at Bayou Place to be greeted by servers in yellow rain slickers—mirroring the production’s sizable chorus of raincoat-clad sailors—and serving up Champagne and “Dark and Stormy” cocktails. Thematic table décor by Kirksey Gregg was the perfect backdrop to City Kitchen’s creative cuisine.
LA BOHÈME CAST PARTY
October 26, 2018

Tears turned to big smiles after the curtain came down on opening night of La bohème, as the cast, artistic team, and HGO Patrons celebrated director John Caird’s take on opera’s most beloved love story. The cast starred HGO Studio alums Nicole Heaston, Pureum Jo, and Michael Sumuel alongside Italian tenor Ivan Magri in his HGO debut. Caird returns to HGO in the spring as librettist and director for HGO’s 66th world-premiere opera, The Phoenix.

The cast and artistic team of La bohème with Perryn Leech

Korean Consul General Hyung Gil Kim and Dr. Soo Kyung Yun with Pureum Jo
Barbara Van Postman, Penny Wright, and Rini Ziegler
Nicole Heaston with family (L to R) Morgan, Julian, and Stanley Lane

SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 2019 | THE REVAIRE

Marcia and Alfredo Vilas, Chairmen
Monica Fulton, Auction Chair | Sara and Gabriel Loperena, Wine Auction Chairmen

A grand fiesta honoring the vibrant culture and creative contributions of Mexico.

“Cielito Lindo”—loosely translated to “pretty darling” or “heavenly one”—is a traditional Mexican song written by Quirino Mendoza y Cortés in 1882 and beloved throughout the Spanish-speaking world and beyond as a symbol of unity.

For table, ticket, and underwriting information, contact Brooke Rogers, 713-546-0271 or brogers@hgo.org.
HGO.ORG/OPERABALL
On October 7, HGO’s Laureate Society welcomed soprano Nicole Heaston (Mimì in La bohème) and pianist Kirill Kuzmin to the Junior League’s stage and honored first-ever Laureate Society member Carol Fletcher at the annual Afternoon of Music Laureate Society Recital. Over 160 Laureate Society members, opera lovers who have made commitments to HGO in their estate plans, enjoyed dinner and lively conversation after the recital.

Without your donation, your favorite opera would be over before the first act ended.

DONORS MAKE GREAT ART POSSIBLE.

Ticket sales cover only 25% of our annual costs. We rely on you for the rest. We’re counting on you—become an HGO donor today.

As an HGO donor, you will receive exclusive member benefits designed to enhance your opera experience.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact Jennifer Wijangco, director of development, at 713-546-0704 or jwijangco@hgo.org.
The Armadillo’s Tea November 4, 2018

Over 100 well-dressed ladies and gents gathered at the St. Regis on a Sunday afternoon for The Armadillo’s Tea, marking the launch of The Armadillo’s Dream, HGO’s first-ever children’s story book. Chaired by Connie Kwan-Wong, whose foundation underwrote the creation and publishing of the book, the afternoon started with “bubbles and book signing” followed by high tea service. Book author and HGOco Touring Programs Manager Dennis Arrowsmith treated the room to a reading and led a sing-along of “The Armadillo’s Song,” by composer Mark Buller. The party raised over $30,000 for HGOco, HGO’s education and community outreach arm.

THE ARMADILLO’S DREAM

November 4, 2018

Author Dennis Arrowsmith

Carleen Graham and Sandy the Armadillo

Zoe Wong and Alexander Rogers

Gabriel, Alejandro, Alisa, and Maxwell Magallón

Kelly Finn, Lisa Long, and Dr. Timothy Doyle

Connie Kwan-Wong with daughter Zoe

Evan Redd, Elaina Clarke, and Linda Clarke

Brenda Harvey-Traylor and Janet Sims

Back L–R: Rebecca Brands, Mary Rebecca Dick
Front L–R: Annie Brands, Eleanor Dick, and Catherine Dick

Photos by Priscilla Dickson

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The Armadillo’s Dream by Dennis Arrowsmith

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Spotlight

From Bohemian Paris to the Amazon River, you can see the whole world onstage at Houston Grand Opera.

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Co-headquartered in Houston and New York with 2,000 employees and 35 international locations, FROSCH has grown from a local agency into a global leader in luxury and business travel since 1977. A native South African, FROSCH Chairman Richard Leibman has been part of the HGO family for many years as a subscriber and Patron. A love of travel runs in the family: Richard’s son, Bryan, is president and CEO while his daughter, Lara, serves as executive vice president. Richard and John A. Evatz, director of luxury business development, represent FROSCH as HGO Trustees.

“I’ve always loved coming to HGO because I know that the art onstage will be nothing short of world-class and that HGO will go the extra step to make the experience special,” shares Richard. “FROSCH is just the same—we believe in excellence and taking those extra steps to deliver the unexpected.”

FROSCH is one of HGO’s treasured corporate partners, supporting our mainstage season and offering invaluable in-kind services as HGO’s travel agent. From staff travel to artist arrangements and our second-to-none Patron travel program, HGO relies on FROSCH to ensure seamless journeys in the name of great opera.

“Traveling with members of the HGO family—great friends who share a passion for our art form—is always a blast,” says Scott Ipsen, HGO’s director of patron services. Scott relies on FROSCH to help make travel arrangements when the HGO Patrons Circle journeys to opera houses around the world. “FROSCH is a wonderful resource that helps make all of our arrangements seamless and stress-free. I can’t wait for the next trip, and neither can our Patrons!”

Whether you’re traveling on business or exploring opera around the globe, FROSCH’s renowned white-glove service is one step ahead of every detail to provide peace of mind and make your next trip the best trip ever.

Mike Arellano and Tom Burley

Q&A with HGO Trustees Mike Arellano and Tom Burley, both recent retirees from the oil and gas industry, and fans of HGO, travel, and Houston’s cultural scene.

What’s the strangest thing you’ve seen during a night at the opera? Watching Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg snooze through Strauss’s Capriccio at the Santa Fe Opera!

How did you first get hooked on opera? Tom: We both played instruments in grade school. Mike got hooked on opera after seeing a local college production of Mozart’s Così fan tutte. I had a wonderful teacher who got me excited about opera and Shakespeare. We’ve been coming to HGO together for many years.

When you’re not at the Wortham, where are you? Traveling everywhere (we loved the opera houses in Paris!), hiking and biking on trails across the country, and visiting microbreweries and wineries. We are also active with AIDS Walk Houston, Montrose Grace Place, Human Rights Campaign, and anything to do with the Houston LGBTQ community.

Why do you love Houston? It’s diverse, laid back, and friendly. The restaurants are terrific, and we’re huge fans of the Astros, Dynamo, and Texans. In addition to HGO, we love the small theater companies like the Obsidian Theater, the Catastrophic Theatre, and the Ensemble Theatre. There is so much to do in this town!

Why do you support HGO? We believe in opera. We also became interested in getting more involved and understanding how things work behind the scenes. Becoming HGO Trustees brings us to another level of knowing the company and spending time with more like-minded people who love the arts. We’ve really enjoyed tours of the HGO warehouse, the costume shop, the Opera Unwrapped series, and any chance to learn more and meet new opera friends.

If you were a character from an opera, who would you be? Tom: Definitely a supporting role—I’m not too much of a diva.

Mike: I think of myself as one of the Rhinemaidens from Wagner’s Das Rheingold, splashing around in the water, but in reality I’m more like Brünnhilde lying dead in a circle of fire.
JUDY AND RICHARD AGEE
HGO subscribers since 2000–01, Judy and Dick are ardent believers in the power of storytelling through words and music. They partnered with the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston Inner-City Catholic Schools to bring HGOco programs to economically disadvantaged students. Judy and Dick, the founder and chairman of Wapiti Energy LLC and Bayou Well Holdings Company LLC, are members of HGO’s Founders Council. Beyond their generous support of general operations and HGOco, they also support Concert of Arias and HGO’s mainstage productions.

THE ANCHORAGE FOUNDATION
Many Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds experience opera for the first time during HGO’s free public performances at Miller Outdoor Theatre, an annual tradition made possible by the longstanding generosity of The Anchorage Foundation. The Foundation has been improving the quality of life in Houston for four decades, and made a generous contribution to HGO’s Hurricane Harvey recovery fund. Marc Melcher is president of The Anchorage Foundation, and his family has been involved with HGO for over 25 years.

ROBIN ANGLY AND MILES SMITH
HGO subscribers Robin and Miles joined the Founders Council in 2010. The company is honored to have Robin on the HGO Board of Directors and as a member of HGO’s Laureate Society. The couple is very familiar with the view from the HGO stage as well—both are former singers in the HGO Chorus. Robin and Miles have been donors to HGO special events, the Young Artists Vocal Academy, and HGO’s Ring cycle.

DENISE AND PHILIP BAHR
Denise and Philip have supported the Opera since 1996, underwriting special events and mainstage productions. They have a special love for the HGO Studio, where opera’s rising stars have benefited from their support since 2000. Denise, currently an HGO Trustee, is a former member of the HGO Board of Directors, and the Opera has been privileged to have Philip’s participation on the board since 1998. The Opera was honored to have the couple chair the 2010 Opera Ball.

JANICE BARROW
Jan’s relationship with HGO extends back to the early 1980s, when she and her late husband, Dr. Thomas Barrow, first became subscribers. Jan is a member of HGO’s Laureate Society and the Founders Council, contributing to HGO’s main stage and special events. She also supports the HGO Studio, having underwritten several rising opera stars over the past 20 years. Jan’s late husband, Tom, former chairman of the HGO Board of Directors, was instrumental in the concept and construction of the Wortham Center. A lifelong lover of music, Jan is past president of the Houston Symphony and has a special affinity for Puccini and Wagner.

BBVA COMPASS
HGO is privileged to partner with BBVA Compass, a U.S. subsidiary of BBVA, a Spain-based global financial services group founded in 1857. BBVA Compass is committed to financial education, diversity, and the arts, and supports the NEXUS Initiative, HGO’s affordability program, as well as mainstage productions like this season’s La bohème.

THE BROWN FOUNDATION, INC.
The Brown Foundation, Inc., established in 1951 by Herman and Margaret Root Brown and George R. and Alice Pratt Brown, has been a treasured partner of HGO since 1984. Based in Houston, the Foundation distributes funds principally for education, community service, and the arts, especially the visual and performing arts. HGO is tremendously grateful for The Brown Foundation’s leadership support, which has been critical to the company’s unprecedented growth and success in recent years. The Brown Foundation was among the lead contributors to HGO’s Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts.
IMPRESARIOS CIRCLE, CONTINUED

ZANE AND BRADY CARRUTH
Brady is the chief executive officer and president of Saratoga Financial Group and is a trustee of The Wortham Foundation, Inc. Zane is the President of Carson Marketing, LLC, with over 25 years of marketing experience. HGO subscribers since the 2012–13 season, Zane and Brady are members of the Founders Council for Artistic Excellence and served as the chairmen of the 2017 Opera Ball. HGO is proud to have Zane on the HGO Board of Directors. She also serves on the Marketing and Communications Committee. In 2016, HGOco presented a world premiere Storybook Opera program based on Zane’s children’s book, The World’s First Tooth Fairy...Ever.

ANNE AND ALBERT CHAO
Anne and Albert have been subscribers and supporters of HGO for the past two decades. While serving as president and CEO of Westlake Chemical Corporation, Albert finds time for numerous cultural causes. He is a member of the HGO Board of Directors and was the co-chair of Inspiring Performance—The Campaign for Houston Grand Opera. Over the years, the Chaos have sponsored HGO special events, the HGO Studio, HGOco’s Song of Houston, and mainstage productions. The couple has also supported the HGO Endowment through their family foundation, the Ting Tsung and Wei Fong Chao Foundation.

LOUISE CHAPMAN
Louise Chapman of Corpus Christi, Texas, has been a longtime supporter of HGO, recently contributing generously to the company’s Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts. Louise’s late husband, John O. Chapman, was a south Texas agricultural businessman and philanthropist. In addition to HGO, the Chapmans have supported numerous organizations in health, education, and the arts, including Texas A & M University, the Corpus Christi Symphony, and the Art Museum of South Texas. Louise and HGO Trustee Connie Dyer have known each other since they were college roommates at The University of Texas. The couple have supported numerous organizations in health, education, and the arts. More than three decades, The Cullen Foundation has been a vital member of the HGO family. Established in 1947, the Foundation has more than a half-century history of giving generously to education, health care, and the arts in Texas, primarily in the Greater Houston area. The Opera is very grateful for the Foundation’s longstanding leadership support of HGO’s Family and Holiday Opera Series.
The Cullen Trust for the Performing Arts
The Cullen Trust for the Performing Arts has been a lead underwriter of HGO’s mainstage season for nearly 30 years. The Trust was established from assets of The Cullen Foundation to specifically benefit Texas performing arts institutions, particularly those within the Greater Houston area. In recent years, The Cullen Trust has provided lead support for memorable productions including HGO’s Family and Holiday Opera Series, and made a leadership contribution to HGO’s Hurricane Harvey recovery fund.

The Elkins Foundation
Established by Margaret Weiss Elkins and James A. Elkins Jr. in 1956, The Elkins Foundation enriches our community by supporting a wide variety of educational, healthcare, cultural, community, and religious organizations. We are honored that Jenny Elkins and her family have been part of the HGO family for more than 15 years.

Drs. Liz Grimm and Jack Roth
HGO subscribers since the 2013–14 season, Liz and Jack have both committed themselves to cancer research and patient care through their work at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. Jack is a member of the HGO Board of Directors and serves on the HGO Studio Committee. Liz and Jack were generous underwriters of HGO’s historic, first-ever Ring cycle and are lead supporters of HGO’s upcoming German repertoire, including last season’s Elektra. Additionally, Liz and Jack chaired the 2018 Opera Ball on April 14, 2018.

Houston Endowment, Inc.
HGO is grateful for the longtime leadership support of the Houston Endowment, a private foundation established in 1937 by Jesse H. and Mary Gibbs Jones to improve the quality of life for all Houstonians. Houston Endowment recently supported an expansion of our Opera to Go! program that allows for free performances in underserved communities, schools, and other venues. The Endowment made a historic $5 million grant to HGO in 2007 to help us launch NEXUS, our affordability program.

Houston Grand Opera Endowment, Inc.
Established and incorporated in 1982, the Houston Grand Opera Endowment (HGOE) is a vital financial management tool that ensures HGO has a reliable, regular source of income. Today, the Endowment contains over 50 named funds, both unrestricted and restricted, and annually distributes 5 percent of the Endowment’s average market value to HGO, making it the largest single annual funder of the Opera. HGOE leadership includes Chairman Thomas Rushing, Senior Chairman Janet Langford Carrig, and several members of the HGO Board of Directors.

Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo
For more than 15 years, the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo™ has supported HGOco’s arts education programs, helping more than one million Houston area students experience the magic of live opera through Opera to Go!, the Student Performance Series, and Storybook Opera. A 501(c)(3) charity, the Show has committed more than $475 million to the youth of Texas since 1932. The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is the world’s largest livestock show and rodeo, with more than 2.4 million attendees in 2018.

Houston Methodist
For over ten years, Houston Grand Opera has partnered with Houston Methodist, the official health care provider for HGO. Houston Methodist’s Center for Performing Arts Medicine (CPAM) is the only center of its kind in the country, comprising a specialized group of more than 100 physicians working collaboratively to address the specific demands placed upon performing artists. In addition to the first-rate medical care CPAM provides HGO artists, Houston Methodist also generously supports HGO’s special events and mainstage productions, is a major community partner on Seeking the Human Spirit, and is the presenter of HGO’s young professional programs. HGO is fortunate to have Dr. Barbara Bass and Dr. Mauro Ferrari, president and CEO, Houston Methodist Research Institute, serve as Houston Methodist’s corporate trustees.

The Humphreys Foundation
Based in Liberty, Texas, the Humphreys Foundation has been a major underwriter of HGO’s mainstage season since 1980. Geraldine Davis Humphreys (d. 1961), a member of the pioneer Hardin family of Liberty, Texas, bequeathed her estate to the Humphreys Foundation, which was formally established in 1959. The Foundation provides support for performing arts Texas and college scholarship funding for students in the arts. Linda Bertman, Louis Paine, and Robert Wall serve as trustees of the Humphreys Foundation. In recent years, the Foundation’s generous support has helped make possible unforgettable mainstage productions.

Nancy and Richard Kinder
Nancy and Rich became HGO subscribers during the 2000–01 season. Rich is co-founder, chairman, and CEO of Kinder Morgan, and Nancy is a focused philanthropist whose work has positively impacted communities throughout Houston and beyond. Rich and Nancy established the Kinder Foundation in 1997 to provide impactful gifts to projects dedicated to urban green space, education, and quality-of-life issues in the Greater Houston area. HGO is indebted to the Kinders for their visionary support in areas including general operations, mainstage productions, special events, and especially HGOco, the Opera’s innovative education and community collaboration initiative.
**IMPRESARIOS CIRCLE, CONTINUED**

**CLAIRE LIU AND JOSEPH GREENBERG**
Claire and Joe have subscribed to HGO for many seasons and are members of HGO’s Founders Council for Artistic Excellence. Claire serves on the HGO Board of Directors and is chair of the Finance Committee. She is newly retired from LyondellBasell Industries where she led the corporate finance team and was formerly a managing director with Bank of America. Joe is founder, president, and CEO of Alta Resources, L.L.C., a private company involved in the development of shale oil and gas resources in North America. Claire and Joe support many organizations, with particular emphasis on educational organizations including YES Prep and Teach for America. An avid runner, Claire has completed a marathon in all 50 states.

**BETH MADISON**
This season marks Beth’s 23rd as an HGO subscriber. HGO has had the honor of her support since 2004. Past chair of the HGO Board of Directors, she currently serves on the Executive, Finance, and HGO Studio Committees, and is an active member of HGO’s Founders Council. She was the honoree at the 2017 Concert of Arias. Beth generously supports the HGO Studio, special events, and mainstage operas. Beth has been inducted into the Greater Houston Women’s Hall of Fame and serves on the University of Houston System Board of Regents.

**JOHN P. McGOVERN FOUNDATION**
John P. McGovern was a pediatrician, allergist, immunologist, and educator who was instrumental in shaping the Texas Medical Center. Kathrine McGovern oversees the foundation named for her late husband, which was established in 1961 and is one of the largest charities in Houston. HGO is grateful for the many years of The John P. McGovern Foundation’s support of our mainstage season and our annual Concert of Arias, as well as a transformational contribution to our Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts.

**JANICE AND ROBERT MCNAIR**
Janice and the late Bob McNair, longtime HGO subscribers, are well known for their incredible philanthropy and for bringing the NFL back to Houston. Bob was senior chairman of McNair Interests, a financial and real estate firm, and owner of the Houston Texans. The Robert and Janice McNair Foundation provides leadership support to Houston-area organizations supporting educational opportunities for youth. The McNair Foundation is the lead supporter of HGO’s Family and Holiday Opera Series. Bob was a former chair of the HGO Board of Directors (1995–97).

**M.D. ANDERSON FOUNDATION**
The M.D. Anderson Foundation has provided general operating support to HGO for more than 30 years. The Foundation was established in 1936 by Monroe Dunaway Anderson, whose company, Anderson, Clayton and Co., was the world’s largest cotton merchant. While the Foundation started the Texas Medical Center and was instrumental in bringing to it one of the premier cancer centers in the world, the Foundation’s trustees also looked to improve the wellness of communities through the arts. HGO is deeply grateful for the M.D. Anderson Foundation’s support of the company’s recovery from Hurricane Harvey, and we are privileged to have such a longstanding and committed partner in enhancing the quality of life for all Houstonians.

**THE MELLON FOUNDATION**
Established in 1969, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation supports a wide range of initiatives to strengthen the humanities, arts, higher education, and cultural heritage. The driving force behind so many of HGO’s new commissions, The Mellon Foundation’s longstanding support of HGO helps us tell relevant new stories and add to the operatic repertoire by developing new works, like Tarik O’Regan and John Caird’s *The Phoenix*.

**MILLER THEATRE ADVISORY BOARD**
The Miller Theatre Advisory Board (MTAB), appointed by Houston’s mayor and confirmed by the City Council, acts as a steward of public and private funds to provide professional-caliber performances free to the public at the Miller Outdoor Theatre for the cultural enrichment of Houston’s diverse communities and visitors to the city. HGO’s partnership with MTAB extends over six decades, making great opera accessible to thousands of Houstonians each year through live mainstage and Opera to Go! performances at Miller Theatre. June Deadrick is an HGO trustee representing the Miller Theatre Advisory Board.

**SARA AND BILL MORGAN**
Sara and Bill have been supporting HGO since 2002. Sara is a co-founder of the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, where she currently serves on the board. Bill is a co-founder of the Kinder Morgan Energy Companies and the retired vice chairman and president of Kinder Morgan, Inc., and Kinder Morgan Energy Partners, L.P. The Morgans support HGO, HGO’s special events, and mainstage productions, including the Holiday Opera Series. HGO is thrilled to have Sara serve on the HGO Board of Directors and as a member and past chair of the HGO Board of Directors.
NOVUM ENERGY
Founded in 2011 in Panama, Novum Energy is an international physical oil supply and trading company committed to industry excellence in delivery standards and customer service. Founder and President Alfredo Vilas serves on the HGO Board of Directors and has over 20 years of experience and a passion for service to the community through cultural, recreational, and philanthropic work. Novum Energy has supported a number of HGO productions, including last season's West Side Story and the mariachi operas Cruzar la Cara de la Luna and El Pasado Nunca Se Termina. Alfredo and his wife, Marcia, currently serve as event chairmen for Opera Ball 2019, taking place on April 13.

SCHLUMBERGER
Schlumberger is a leading corporate contributor to HGO, supporting the main stage and a wide range of special projects over nearly 20 years. Schlumberger’s leadership gift was integral to launching HGO’s ongoing affordability program, the NEXUS Initiative, in 2007—since then, NEXUS has made great opera accessible to more than 275,000 people. HGO is honored to count Schlumberger among its most dedicated corporate supporters. Fred Dyen, Cameron Group HR director, serves on the HGO Board of Directors.

OPERATION AMERICA
HGO is honored by our longstanding partnership with OPERA America, a New York based service organization that has been providing members with the resources and expertise to advance the art form of opera in North America since 1970. Current OPERA America–supported projects include the Seeking the Human Spirit initiative. HGO Managing Director Perryn Leech is proud to serve on the board of OPERA America.

THE POWELL FOUNDATION
Founded in 1967 by Houston-based attorney Ben H. Powell and his wife, Kitty King Powell, The Powell Foundation improves the lives of residents of Harris, Travis, and Walker counties through charitable work in the fields of education, conservation, human services, and the arts. In addition to its longstanding support of HGOc/o’s impactful student programs, The Powell Foundation was among the lead contributors to HGO’s Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts.

DIAN AND HARLAN STAI
Harlan, a member of the HGO Board of Directors, and Dian are charter members of HGO’s Founders Council for Artistic Excellence, and their leadership support includes mainstage productions, the HGO Studio, the HGO Endowment, and special events. The Stais have also sponsored HGO Studio artists and they host annual recitals featuring HGO Studio artists at Mansefeldt, their renowned Fredericksburg ranch. HGO was privileged to recognize Dian and Harlan as the honorees of Opening Night 2008 and the 2014 Concert of Arias.

JILL AND ALLYN RISLEY
Allyn and Jill Risley have been HGO subscribers since 2003, and Allyn joined the HGO Board of Directors in the 2015–16 season. Allyn is chairman of Gaztransport & Technigaz (GTT) North America and former general manager of Liquefied Natural Gas at ConocoPhillips, and HGO is honored to have his leadership and expertise on the Development and HGO Studio Committees. Jill owns the Lagniappe Shoppe, a Houston-based dealership in French antiques. The Risleys are generous members of HGO’s Impresarios Circle, and they also support Allyn’s alma mater, Kansas University, where Allyn serves on the School of Engineering advisory board. HGO is grateful for the Risleys’ leadership support of our Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts.

SHELL
Shell is a leader in the Houston arts community, supporting HGO for over 40 years. Shell’s leadership support makes opera more accessible to everyone through the NEXUS Initiative for Affordability and inspires young minds with STEM-aligned arts education opportunities like our annual Opera Camps. Shell was also a major supporter of HGO’s Hurricane Harvey recovery. HGO is honored to have De la Rey Venter, executive vice president of integrated gas ventures, represent Shell on our board of directors, as well as HGO Trustee Christos Angelides, external relations general manager of integrated gas ventures.

TENENBAUM JEWELERS
HGO is thrilled to count Tenenbaum Jewelers as the preferred jeweler of Houston Grand Opera. For 40 years, Tenenbaum has been Houston’s premier destination for unique, rare, and collectible estate jewelry with styles ranging from antique to vintage to contemporary. Owners Tony Bradfield and Kevin Black are familiar faces at HGO performances, recitals, and events. From donating fabulous one-of-a-kind auction items to generously supporting our mainstage opera season and special events, the Tenenbaum team helps HGO sparkle and shine.
MR. AND MRS. ROBERT B. TUdOR III
Bobby Tudor serves as the chairman and CEO of Tudor, Pickering, Holt & Co., LLC, an integrated energy investment and merchant bank providing high quality advice and services to the energy industry. Phoebe has a master’s degree in historic preservation from Columbia University and has worked as an architectural historian for the New Orleans Historic District Landmarks Commission. In addition to supporting HGO’s mainstage productions and special events for many years, the Tudors are major supporters of numerous Houston organizations in the fields of the arts, education, and medicine. The Tudors have three children and have been married for over 35 years.

JOHN G. TURNER & JERRY G. FISCHER
John and Jerry, based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, travel around the world to experience the best that opera has to offer. HGO subscribers and donors for over a decade, the couple’s leadership support of Wagner’s Ring cycle (2014–17) was the largest gift ever made to HGO for a single production. John, a shareholder at Turner Industries Group, is a member of the HGO Board of Directors. Jerry is a board member of Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra. In recent years, John and Jerry have supported HGO mainstage productions, the HGO Studio, and special events. They are members of the Founders Council for Artistic Excellence, and John is a member of HGO’s Laureate Society.

VINSON & ELKINS
HGO has been privileged to have the support of international law firm Vinson & Elkins for nearly three decades. For more than 100 years, V&E has been deeply committed to empowering the communities in which it serves. It has enriched the cultural vibrancy of Houston by supporting HGO through in-kind legal services and contributions to special events and mainstage productions, including this season’s The Pearl Fishers. The Opera is honored to have two V&E partners serve on its board of directors: from left, Chris Bacon and Glen A. Rosenbaum.

MARGARET ALKEK WILLIAMS
Margaret, a longtime singer, possesses a deep affinity for all music, and especially opera, supporting HGO for over 30 years. Currently, Margaret continues her parents’ legacy as chairman of their foundation, where her son Charles A. Williams serves as president. HGO is humbled by Margaret’s incredible generosity and dedication to the company, both as an individual donor and through her family’s foundation. She has endowed the Margaret Alkek Williams Chair, held by HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers, and is a member of HGO’s Laureate Society. A valued member of the HGO Board of Directors, Margaret was the honoree of the 2009 Opera Ball and chairman of the 2014 Ball, and she generously chaired the 2018 Hurricane Harvey benefit Concert HGO and Plácido: Coming Home!

THE WORTHAM FOUNDATION, INC.
In the 1980s, the Wortham Foundation contributed $20 million to lead the capital campaign for the Wortham Theater Center, guided by businessman Gus S. Wortham’s early recognition of the vital role of the arts in making Houston an appealing place to live and work. During their lifetimes, Gus and his wife, Lyndall, were dedicated to improving the lives of Houstonians. The Foundation continues to support the Opera through the Wortham Foundation Permanent Endowment and generous annual operating support. This leadership support has been vital to HGO’s growth and commitment to excellence. The Wortham Foundation’s support of HGO’s Hurricane Harvey recovery helped to bring the company back home, and we are deeply grateful.

LYNN WYATT
Lynn’s generosity touches every aspect of HGO. She is a Lifetime Trustee of HGO and serves as the vice chairman of the HGO Board of Directors. She serves as vice-chair of HGO’s Governance Committee and chaired HGO’s Golden Jubilee Gala in 2005. Oscar Wyatt endowed The Lynn Wyatt Great Artist Fund in 2010, honoring Lynn’s service to the company and dedication to bringing the world’s best operatic artists to HGO, and she was the honoree at the 2010 Opera Ball. Lynn and Oscar have been lead supporters of a number of HGO productions and programs, including the multiyear company-wide initiative Seeking the Human Spirit.
Members of Houston Grand Opera’s Patrons Society support the opera at a level of $5,000 or more, thereby making possible the incredible work of HGO. Members of the Society are entitled to many benefits at the Opera, including complimentary valet parking, Masterson Green Room privileges during performance intermissions, personalized ticket service, two tickets to all open dress rehearsals, Opera Guild membership, a discount on Opera Guild Boutique purchases, and more. HGO gratefully recognizes Patrons Society members. For information on joining the Patrons Society, please call Jennifer Wijangco at 713-546-0704.

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BANDA
You may notice from time to time in the HGO Orchestra listing that there is a “banda”—musicians who play from a location other than the pit. A banda plays twice in *The Pearl Fishers*, and they will be especially easy to pick out in this particular opera, because the pit orchestra does not play at all while the banda is playing. Sometimes a banda actually plays onstage, like the trumpeters in *Aida*, but most of the time they are backstage, as they are in *The Pearl Fishers*. Here’s what to listen for:

At the beginning of Act II, a tambourine and two piccolos accompany the HGO Chorus. In this instance, the basses in the chorus and the tambourine provide a rhythmic accompaniment while the women and tenors sing the melody. The piccolos are intended to provide Eastern flavor.

The second instance comes in the scene following: Leïla has been left alone to pray for the fishermen, and in her aria “Me voila seule dans la nuit...comme autrefois” (Here I am alone in the night…as before), she wonders whether Nadir is nearby. Sure enough, he has come looking for her: when he begins singing offstage, he is accompanied only by a harp backstage.

CHORUS MASTER AND CONCERTMASTER
The chorus master auditions and selects chorus members and rehearses them for performance. HGO’s longtime chorus master is Richard Bado.

CONDUCTOR
It’s easy to see that the conductor is leading the orchestra, but audiences may not realize that he/she is also leading the singers. And conductors do far more than just keep everyone together! Read our interview with *The Pearl Fishers* conductor Rodrick Cox on p. 96, in which he describes what conductors do before they even come to the first rehearsal.

DIRECTOR
The role of the opera director has changed a great deal since the 1920s and ’30s, when many operas still performed today began to enter the public domain. Freed from copyright constraints, directors began reinterpreting operas, sometimes transporting them to other times and locales. Also, as the ideas of Sigmund Freud gained currency, directors increasingly began to favor abstract “mindscapes” instead of traditional settings with realistic-looking furniture. A director collaborates with the designers—set, costume, lighting, and sometimes video—but final choices are ultimately up to the director.

SUPERNUMERARY
Supernumeraries neither speak nor sing onstage, but that doesn’t mean they are not important! They help make crowd scenes look impressive, and sometimes they have something even more special to do. Remember the waiter in *La bohème* who presents the check to Musetta’s elderly paramour? A super. The notary in *The Barber of Seville* who comes (as he thinks) to witness the marriage of Dr. Bartolo and Rosina? A super. In *Florencia en el Amazonas*, the Cabin Boy (Daniel Boyd) is a super role. He is seen most prominently in Act I, when he is helping serve dinner to Paula and Alvaro.

That’s why, in opera, the director is the one who is credited with creating the production, which refers not only to the physical production, i.e., the sets and costumes, but also to the director’s staging. When you see someone credited with the production and another person credited as the revival director, the one credited with the production is the original director, and the revival director is someone who has worked closely with the director on the production and is restaging it the way the director would have.

In *Florencia en el Amazonas*, Francesca Zambello was the original director. For *The Pearl Fishers*, E. Loren Meeker was not the original director, but she is using only the physical production, not the original director’s staging. She is creating her own staging, so she is credited as the director.
CALENDAR 2018–19

For information and to purchase tickets for all Houston Grand Opera events, call the Customer Care Center at 713-228-6737 unless otherwise noted. For information about HGOco events, please call 713-546-0230, email HGOco@hgo.org, or visit HGO.org/community-programs unless otherwise noted.

JANUARY
18, 20m, 26, 30, Feb. 3m
Performances of Catán's Florencia en el Amazonas. Wortham Theater Center’s Brown Theater. Special intermission reception for members of Opening Nights for Young Professionals at the Jan. 18 performance only.

20
Behind the Music: an intimate conversation about Florencia en el Amazonas immediately following the performance. Masterson Green Room. Free.

25, 27m, Feb. 2, 5, 8
Performances of Bizet's The Pearl Fishers. Wortham Theater Center’s Brown Theater. Special intermission reception for members of Opening Nights for Young Professionals at the Jan. 25 performance only.

27
Behind the Music: an intimate conversation about The Pearl Fishers immediately following the performance. Masterson Green Room. Free.

31–Feb. 2
HGOco and Opera to Go! present an engaging 45-minute adaptation of Donizetti's The Elixir of Love. Heinen Theatre, Houston Community College Central campus. Two free performances daily: 9:30 and 11 a.m. The Elixir of Love also tours to schools, libraries, and community centers Jan. 28–May 17. Book a performance at HGO.org/OperaToGo or by calling 713-546-0231.

FEBRUARY
1
Concert of Arias: the 31st Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers. Wortham Center’s Cullen Theater. For information, contact Brooke Rogers at 713-546-0271 or brogers@hgo.org.

3
HGOco presents singers from the Bauer Family High School Voice Studio in a masterclass with tenor Lawrence Brownlee. 2 p.m. Free; public invited. Contact Alisa Magallón at amagallon@hgo.org for information.

15 & 16
HGO Studio Recital Series: Artists of the HGO Studio perform at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Audrey Jones Beck Building, 5601 Main Street, 7:30 p.m.

MARCH
13–15
Spring Break at Discovery Green: HGOco presents activities and performances at Discovery Green, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. daily.

APRIL
2
Opera Night Live: the HGO Guild invites you to the Wortham Theater Center to enjoy wine and snacks and learn more about Don Giovanni from a special guest. Free. 6:30 p.m. For information, contact the Guild at 713-546-0269 or visit hgoguild.org.

6
Spring Event: the HGO Guild holds its annual fundraiser at the Houston Racquet Club, 10709 Memorial Dr. 6:30 p.m. For information, contact the Guild at 713-546-0269 or visit hgoguild.org.

13
Opera Ball 2019: The Revaire, 7 p.m. Followed by the Encore Party. For information, contact Brooke Rogers at 713-546-0271 or brogers@hgo.org.

20, 27, 30, May 3, 5m
Performances of Mozart’s Don Giovanni. Wortham Center’s Brown Theater. Special intermission reception for members of Opening Nights for Young Professionals at the Apr. 20 performance only.

26, 28m, May 4, 7, 10
Performances of the world premiere of Tarik O'Regan and John Caird’s The Phoenix. Wortham Center's Brown Theater. Special intermission reception for members of Opening Nights for Young Professionals at the Apr. 26 performance only.

MAY
2 & 5
HGO Studio Recital Series: Artists of the HGO Studio perform in the intimate and elegant salon at Rienzi, the decorative arts wing of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, at 1406 Kirby Drive. May 2 at 7:30 p.m. and May 5 at 5 p.m.

5
Behind the Music: an intimate conversation about Don Giovanni immediately following the performance. Masterson Green Room. Free.

19
HGOco presents the Bauer Family High School Voice Studio Graduation Recital. Duncan Recital Hall, Rice University. 5 p.m. Free.

JUNE
3–21
HGOco presents a range of Opera Camps geared for students of various ages and interests. Camps are held at the Wortham Theater Center. Registration open now! For information, visit HGO.org/community-programs.

4
HGO Guild Volunteer Gathering: Find out how you can use your talents to help HGO through volunteering with the Guild. United Way of Greater Houston, 50 Waugh Dr., 6:30 p.m. For information, contact the Guild at 713-546-0269 or guild@hgo.org.
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To purchase tickets, call the Customer Care Center at 713-228-6737 or visit HGO.org.

Mozart
DON GIOVANNI
Apr. 20 | 27M | 30 | May 3 | 5M
Sung in Italian with projected English translation

Evolving Perspectives

One of the most exciting things about doing co-productions of major operas is that the interpretation is not set in stone. It can develop and become deeper and more complex. As new casts and audiences around the world experience it, we learn from the production and bring what we learn to future stagings.

This is particularly true about HGO’s upcoming production of Mozart’s masterpiece Don Giovanni. We used the latest technology combined with good, old-fashioned stagecraft to tell the story afresh for this production. Technology allows us to play with the world of the Don and the characters around him in a brand new way, but it is the human insights that continue to deepen with each new revival of the production.

In revisiting this opera in the MeToo era, there are concerns, insights, and angles to be explored in the character of Don Giovanni. His manipulative actions and betrayal of the trust of those around him are now seen more clearly as coercive. We are acutely aware that we must focus on our portrayal of the women who are the main targets of his destructive attentions and whether the Don gets the punishment he deserves in the end.

Mozart’s opera is not just about a predator. It is a statement about any person who manipulates and lies, and who lives life at the cost of others. We are keen to study this character and the consequence of his actions afresh in this era, and we hope it will be a both theatrically fulfilling and thought-provoking new meeting with Mozart’s famous Don.

—Kasper Holten, director

Tarik O’Regan | John Caird
THE PHOENIX
Apr. 26 | 28M | May 4 | 7 | 10
Sung in English and Italian with projected English translation

Building the American Dream

HGO’s 66th world premiere is ostensibly rooted in the grand opera traditions of Europe, but on closer inspection, the story of The Phoenix is truly an American tale.

It is the story of Italian-born Lorenzo da Ponte, who rose from the Jewish ghetto of Venice to become a celebrated opera librettist for Mozart and his contemporaries. Some of his most famous works are the ones he created with Mozart: Don Giovanni, The Marriage of Figaro, and Cosi fan tutte. However, multiple scandals forced his move to America, where, as the title The Phoenix suggests, he rose to prominence once again.

In order to create this operatic version of de Ponte’s life, the creative team has been hard at work throughout the year. Composer Tarik O’Regan, librettist and director John Caird, and HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers came together in Houston in August for a vocal workshop where they heard the characters interact for the first time.

HGO Dramaturg Jeremy Johnson, who is responsible for helping usher new operas into existence, says a vocal music workshop “lifts the music off the page for the first time. The creative team hears it transform from words and notes in their head into live, acoustic art—a workshop lets them react to that to help them illuminate their artistic vision.”

In late October, set and costume designer David Farley gave the production team a sneak peek of what the The Phoenix will look like on the Brown stage; along with Caird, he went through the research and inspiration that will transport the audience from 1770s Venice to 1830s New York City.

Front, from left: Patrick Summers, John Caird, and Tarik O’Regan answer questions after a sing-through at the end of the workshop. Behind them are workshop singers Calvin Griffin and Chad Shelton.
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Please note that the tunnel connecting the Theater District Garage and the Wortham is closed for construction.
RODERICK COX says there was never an epiphany moment when he knew he was meant to become a conductor—but there were certainly some hints along the way. The Alabama native grew up steeped in music: as a child, he sat in on his mom’s church choir and praise team rehearsals. He began performing himself, in church and in talent shows. He got a keyboard and began playing by ear. And he even remembers conducting his action figures!

Now 31, Cox is the 2018 winner of the prestigious Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award and recently concluded a two-year stint as associate conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra. Currently based in Berlin, he Skyped with HGO’s Laura Chandler shortly before coming to Houston to begin rehearsals for The Pearl Fishers—his first foray into opera.

Laura Chandler: What led you to focus upon classical music, and how did that lead to a desire to conduct?

Roderick Cox: I always enjoyed the discipline of music, working with other musicians to achieve a common goal. But I had never seen anyone who looked like me in the role of a conductor. At Northwestern, I took an orchestral conducting class, and my teacher told me he thought I should pursue conducting. At the time, I was playing French horn and envisioned that I would be a university professor teaching band.

What characteristics make a good conductor?

You have to be extremely disciplined and have a high level of curiosity about what the music is saying and how to convey it. You have to examine the material and figure out how to make it truly fly off the pages. And then, you have to be able to convey to the orchestra—all of whom are experts on their own instruments—that your vision is credible.

In an earlier interview, you spoke about how the same piece of music will sound different with two different conductors, because they bring their own interpretations to the music. What are some ways conductors shape the music?

There are many elements in the score that are open to interpretation. How much first violin versus second violin do you want, how much double bass, what speed of the bow do you want, what shape of the bow? Do you want more second flute than first flute? What type of horn colors do you want? What kind of trumpet blend do you want with the horns? What type of cymbal crash? What type of timpani stroke do you want—a harder mallet or a softer mallet? All of those things you’re hearing are not only the composer’s sound world but the conductor’s interpretation of that composer’s sound world.

What is one thing that most people don’t know about the work of a conductor that you wish they did?

For a conductor preparing an opera like The Pearl Fishers, it takes months and months of work at home, studying the libretto, the scores, the parts, the language, and then getting to a point where you feel like you can interpret the language, the score, and the colors, shapes, and harmonies. Then you need to figure out the pacing of it all, how it makes sense. You would work with a coach who’s done the opera and learn about the traditions specific to this particular opera. You’d think about what the singers might do, watch a couple of performances, listen as well, and then conduct through it yourself—all before the first rehearsal.

So what’s interesting is when I’m out with people, and someone asks me what I do. Eighty percent of the time, someone will say, “Oh, you do this” [making hand gestures]. I immediately put their hands down, and I say, “I don’t know what you’re talking about. That’s not what we do.”

Is there anything you wish you had known sooner?

I wish I had studied languages earlier. I wish that in the United States, we urged young people to pursue languages outside of English at an early age and stick with it. In Europe, it’s such an eye-opening experience that people speak two or three languages and not blink an eye about it, so when I decided I wanted to become a conductor, I had to play catch-up in many ways. Part of the reason I’m in Berlin is to work on the language. If language had been part of my culture a little earlier, I think it would have made the playing field a bit more even for me in terms of my European counterparts and would have made learning an opera easier.

Also, I think it was good for my ear that my first musical training was playing by ear, but I wish I had also had the opportunity to take formal piano lessons at an early age, before I started the French horn. Things have worked out for me so far, but I wonder what it would look like for me now if those particular things had been added at an earlier age.
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