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## **Houston Grand Opera Announces New \$22 Million Fund within the HGO Endowment**

*Sarah and Ernest Butler make the largest gift in HGO's 68-year history*

*HGO Studio is renamed Sarah and Ernest Butler Houston Grand Opera Studio*

Houston TX, February 3, 2023 — At tonight's annual *Concert of Arias*, the 35th Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers, Houston Grand Opera announced that Sarah and Ernest Butler have created a new fund within the HGO Endowment valued at \$22 million, the largest philanthropic investment in the 68-year history of the organization. The company also announced that its acclaimed training program for young artists has been renamed the Sarah and Ernest Butler Houston Grand Opera Studio.

"Sarah and I have been Houston Grand Opera subscribers for 35 years, since the company's first season in the Wortham Theater Center," said **Ernest Butler**, "and we've been attending performances at HGO much longer. The two of us have followed the HGO Studio since its inception, watching its graduates go on to successful careers in opera. We've decided to create a new fund within the HGO Endowment that supports the program, because we've seen the endowment's careful fiscal management firsthand. We have tremendous confidence in HGO and want to help this great company expand its mission and its reach, throughout our region and beyond."

"The arts are a reflection of who we are," said **Sarah Butler**. "For our society to be healthy, we must invest in art and culture, which is critical to the wellbeing of humanity. With our investment in HGO's future, Ernest and I want to support the organization through the next century, so that everyone in our part of the world has access to the beauty of grand opera. This gift is a strategic one, because the artistic excellence at HGO supports and elevates cultural endeavors both within, and far beyond, Houston."

The Sarah and Ernest Butler Houston Grand Opera Studio, one of the most respected and highly competitive young artist programs in the world, provides comprehensive career development to young singers and pianist/coaches who have demonstrated potential to make major contributions to the artform. During residencies that last up to three years, artists receive individualized study programs in classical singing, piano, and coaching, as well as movement and language instruction. Butler Studio artists are afforded numerous performance opportunities, including major and supporting roles in mainstage productions, working with world-renowned artists, directors, and conductors.

"We are deeply grateful to Sarah and Ernest Butler for their vision, their decade-spanning support and leadership of HGO, and this history-making gift to secure its future," said HGO General Director and CEO **Khori Dastoor**. "Having gotten to know this extraordinary couple since assuming leadership at HGO, I know the careful consideration they've put into this strategic investment. The trust the Butlers have placed in this organization; their belief in HGO's impact as a world-class cultural institution; their decision to invest in the company as an industry leader that nourishes the careers of the most talented young artists in the field—it is both inspiring and humbling. All of us at the company are thrilled to honor them not only through our renamed Sarah and Ernest Butler Houston Grand Opera Studio, but also through our pursuit of artistic excellence of the highest order."

Sarah and Ernest Butler, who are based in Austin and travel to Houston for HGO performances, have supported the company for decades. Most recently, in 2020, after the onset of COVID made live performance impossible, the couple made an essential \$1 million donation to Houston Grand Opera to create HGO Digital, the Sarah and Ernest Butler Performance Series. The gift supported the Texas Opera Alliance, a strategic partnership between HGO and four other companies throughout the state that enabled the production of shareable digital for audiences at home. Today HGO Digital, now in its third season, offers virtual programming to complement the company's live mainstage performances.

Both native Texans, the Butlers attended Baylor University. Sarah is a retired educator, and Ernest is a retired otolaryngologist who founded the Austin Ear Nose and Throat Clinic, as well as Acoustic Systems, a company that manufactures booths for hearing tests, musical practice, and broadcasting. The Butlers have dedicated the larger part of their lives to their involvement and philanthropy in the arts and sciences, providing generous financial support and leadership to the organizations they support, including Austin Opera, Ballet Austin, Austin Symphony Orchestra, the Texas Cultural Trust, and the University of Texas Butler School of Music, which has carried their name since 2008. They were inducted into the Austin Arts Hall of Fame in 2004 and received the Texas Medal of the Arts in 2011 from the Texas Cultural Trust.

Sarah has been on the Ballet Austin Board of Directors for almost 20 years and currently serves as its Board of Directors Chair and Foundation Chair. She recently received the Honorary Gold Membership from the Women's Symphony League, recognizing 50 years of active membership. She was recognized as the 2017 Woman of Distinction by the Girl Scouts of Central Texas and received the 2016 Champion Award from Dance USA. Ernest helped found the Texas Medical Foundation, now the TMF Health Quality Institute, and the Central Texas Medical Foundation. He currently serves as the Chairman of the Board and the Endowment Investment Committee Chair of the Austin Symphony Orchestra.

For more information on Houston Grand Opera's upcoming productions, the Butler Studio, and opportunities to support the organization, visit [HGO.org](http://HGO.org).

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Link to *photos of Sarah and Ernest Butler* [here](#).

### **About Houston Grand Opera**

Houston Grand Opera (HGO) is one of the largest, most innovative, and most highly acclaimed opera companies in the United States. General Director and CEO Khori Dastoor assumed leadership of the organization and responsibility for its strategic vision in 2021. HGO was the only American finalist for Opera Company of the Year in the 2019 International Opera Awards, and the only American company to be nominated twice. In fulfilling its mission to advance the operatic art, to serve the Houston community, and to be a global leader in the future of opera, HGO has led the field in commissioning and producing new works (73 world premieres to date) and in training and nurturing promising young artists and administrators. The company contributes to the cultural enrichment of Houston and the nation through a diverse and innovative program of performances, community events, and education projects that reaches the widest possible public. HGO's pioneering Community and Learning initiative has served as a model for other arts organizations.

The NEXUS Initiative is HGO's multiyear ticket underwriting program that allows Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to enjoy opera without the barrier of price. Since 2007, NEXUS has enabled more than 250,000



Houstonians to experience superlative opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

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

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