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Welcome to the world premiere of composer Joel Thompson and librettist Andrea Davis Pinkney’s *The Snowy Day*, based on the 1962 children’s book by Ezra Jack Keats. We at Houston Grand Opera could not be more excited to present this world premiere to you for the holiday season; nor could I be more excited to take the podium as conductor.

As we return to the theater and some semblance of normal life, this lovely new work feels like the antidote to all that has been ailing us. Like the book that inspired it, *The Snowy Day* shares the tale of Peter, a young boy whose parents allow him to set out and explore the city after a fresh coat of snow has fallen.

Keats’s bestselling book is possessed of enduring universal appeal. Some may be surprised to learn that when Keats wrote and illustrated it, there was no other mainstream children’s book with a Black boy as the protagonist. The publication of *The Snowy Day* made history, and its touching story has been a hit with generations of young readers—yours truly included—ever since.

Another of those young readers was none other than our librettist, Andrea Davis Pinkney, who would grow up to have an incredible career as a bestselling, Coretta Scott King Award-winning author. Still another was Joel Thompson, now a brilliant composer. It has been the honor of a lifetime to invite Pinkney to join forces with Thompson to create this new work, which, while based on a book for children, is decidedly not a children’s opera, but one for the whole family to enjoy.

I am thrilled to welcome Omer Ben Seadia, a frequent HGO collaborator, back to Houston to direct our talented cast, which features several artists from the HGO Studio, led by Raven McMillon as Peter, with Elena Villalón as Amy, Cory McGee as Billy, and Ricardo Garcia as part of the ensemble. They are joined by Karen Slack as Mama in her HGO mainstage debut, Andres Acosta as Papi/Jasper, and HGO Studio alumnus Nicholas Newton as Daddy/Tim.

As with every new opera, *The Snowy Day’s* journey to the stage has been years in the making. Adding to the anticipation has been the yearlong delay of its debut after COVID scuttled our plans last December. Yet the opera’s world premiere at this moment feels fated. What better time than now to celebrate the joys of friendship, family togetherness, life’s simple pleasures, and—even in Houston—winter’s magic? I hope you enjoy it.

Patrick Summers
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Eunice Napanangka Jack, *Hairstring*, 18” x 65”

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How we’ll miss the Music Director of the HGO Studio.

The entire Houston Grand Opera community was heartbroken after Miah Im passed away in September. Though her tenure as Music Director of the Houston Grand Opera Studio was brief, her profound effect on her colleagues lives on.

Im joined HGO in the summer of 2020 from Los Angeles Opera, where she served as head of music staff for four years. In addition to her appointment with HGO’s training program for young artists, she also became director of opera studies at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music.

“When Miah Im came to work with the HGO Studio last season, it was a dream come true,” said Brian Speck, Director of the HGO Studio. “Her empathic and vivacious spirit, dedication to developing talent, and outstanding musicianship gave great meaning to every moment she spent with the company, and she is greatly missed.”

Houston Grand Opera offers condolences to her family, and we reflect on happy memories of her unique presence as we come to terms with the pain of her passing.

A NEW TRADITION

Monday Night Opera: it’s back!

Monday Night Opera was born as a way for the HGO family to stay connected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout our entire digital 2020-21 season, HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers and Dramaturg Jeremy Johnson gathered with supporters and opera-world luminaries every week over Zoom. This virtual meeting of the minds has been such a wonderful way for opera lovers to connect with each other and this art form, we’ve brought it back for 2021-22!

This season’s Monday Night Opera series launched with Khori Dastoor, HGO General Director and CEO, joining Summers in a fascinating, wide-ranging conversation with a large group of opera fans. Events will take place approximately twice a month through the spring and feature a wide range of topics and interview subjects, from conversations with the creatives and artists behind our mainstage works, to open forums where anything goes, to trivia nights, to deeper looks into the history of opera. There’s no better way to start off the week!
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Dear Opera Patron,

We’re delighted to join Houston Grand Opera in bringing some wintry wonder to your Houston holiday season with the world premiere of Joel Thompson and Andrea Davis Pinkney’s The Snowy Day.

Bank of America is proud to support HGO’s The Snowy Day and the story’s important legacy celebrating Black protagonists in art and literature. Based on the groundbreaking children’s book by Ezra Jack Keats, The Snowy Day has been opening eyes and hearts through Peter’s joyful day in the snow since 1962.

Through our ongoing partnership with HGO and many of our city’s outstanding arts organizations, Bank of America is able to help communities thrive and connect with one another through the incredible power of the arts.

Thank you for joining us and we wish you and your loved ones a joyous new year.

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Dear Opera Patron,

All of us at The Cullen Foundation are excited to welcome you to the world premiere of Joel Thompson and Andrea Davis Pinkney’s *The Snowy Day*, based on the beloved 1962 children’s book by Ezra Jack Keats. As a founding supporter of Houston Grand Opera’s Holiday Opera Series, it is our joy to help bring this whimsical story to life through music and onstage magic.

Since 1947, The Cullen Foundation has continued the legacy of Hugh Roy and Lillie Cullen by supporting cultural arts, education, health care, and public services in the greater Houston area.

We are honored to share the gift of an inspirational story set to beautiful music with Houston families and visitors of all ages and backgrounds.

Enjoy the performance and we wish you a wonderful holiday season!

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The profound legacy of the great American opera composer, who passed away on September 30 at age 95.

By Patrick Summers, Artistic and Music Director, Houston Grand Opera

It was common in the 19th century to carve the names of composers into the proscenium of an opera house, sometimes even enshrining their names on ornate facades as well, as one can still see in grand old houses like Zürich or Barcelona.

The old Metropolitan Opera House in NYC sat on Broadway between 39th and 40th, nearly in Times Square, and its decorative gold proscenium (the largest in America) had six names permanently looking over the stage: Beethoven, Glück, Gounod, Mozart, Verdi, and Wagner. The message was clear: however American it might be outside, this auditorium is European.

The most important friendship of Carlisle Floyd’s life was with David Gockley, a relationship that uniquely affected the history of American opera. David, as the entrepreneurial young General Director of Houston Grand Opera in the early 1970s, had an overriding instinct that no one else had at that time, though it has now, by imitation, become the standard for artistic leaders in the United States.

He knew that a young American city like Houston, a burgeoning boom and bust town with family foundations and wealthy donors, should be more than a just a center of commerce.
As a young baritone, David was deeply moved by a performance of Carlisle’s *Susannah*, and saw in it a new future for American opera. *Susannah* was big and symphonic, Verdi if he’d been American, and it required the kind of voices David most admired: rafter-shaking actors who sing rather than singers who act.

**Houston Grand Opera** has had a unique guardian in Carlisle Floyd (b. 1926). He guided both a postwar American operatic repertoire he had helped create and had strongly influenced in others, as well as a company he quietly fostered for more than half of its history, subtly steering its aesthetics and values.

No other company in the history of opera has had such a long creative relationship with a living composer as has Houston Grand Opera with Carlisle Floyd, who also founded the renowned Houston Grand Opera Studio with David Gockley in 1977.

Carlisle Floyd’s first two operas were divergent views of a single theme: the corruptive hypocrisy of religion when it is divorced from the theologies it professes. They are *Slow Dusk*, written when he was 23, and, six years later, by far the most-performed work of his life, *Susannah*, set in Appalachia, based on the Biblical tale of Susannah and the Elders, accepted by Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches as an episode from the Book of Daniel, but considered part of the Apocrypha by Protestant faiths.

One has to harken back to another era to find an artistic parallel to Carlisle’s: the long 19th century career of composer Giuseppe Verdi encompassed 54 years between his inaugural *Oberto* and his final glorious *Falstaff*, but an unprecedented 67 years separate *Slow Dusk* and Carlisle Floyd’s last opera, *Prince of Players*, his fifth commission for HGO.

Each of the previous operas were American subjects: *Bilby’s Doll*, written to commemorate the American Bicentennial in 1976, was based on *A Mirror of Witches*, exploring spiritual tensions in the Massachusetts Puritan settlements, themes reminiscent of Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*. 1981’s *Willie Stark* was based on Robert Penn Warren’s *All the King’s Men*, the incredible story of a life almost too big for opera, the Louisiana governor, Huey P. Long. *The Passion of Jonathan Wade*, from 1991, is a grand family tragedy of Reconstruction Era America, and the autumnal and joyful *Cold Sassy Tree*, set near Floyd’s South Carolina birthplace, which was HGO’s first commissioned opera of the new century and was, so we all thought at the time, Carlisle’s final operatic statement, his *Falstaff*.

Carlisle Floyd was the only composer who could look back upon such a vast sea-change of trends in American musical theater and opera. He began in an era when art was thoroughly segregated between the high and middle-brow.

“High” art, in terms of opera in the 1950s, still meant largely European art and musical modernism, remnants of the second Viennese School, one of the only genuine lines of creative thought that survived the devastating cultural severing of WWI, and which avant-garde composers kept alive within academies, conservatories, and universities well into the 1970s.

**Floyd with Débria Brown, Dale Duesing, and Sheryl Woods, stars of his opera *The Passion of Jonathan Wade*, which HGO staged in 1991.**
“New American Opera” in the 1950s was a decidedly short list. The concurrent era in the American Musical Theater was a golden age of composition and engagement with a broad public: Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe, Frank Loesser, Irving Berlin, Meredith Willson, Leonard Bernstein, brought top-level musicianship and theatrical craftwork into a world that had previously been dubbed lightweight.

From the vantage point of European modernism, which was the unassailable lodestar of musical composition in the post-WWII years in America, Carlisle Floyd, Gian Carlo Menotti, and a few others wrote popular operas that were considered by some of the critical establishment at the time as safe throwbacks to some mythical past, and vestiges of this haughty view occasionally reappear even now.

Far from being a throwback, Carlisle can now accurately be seen as a revolutionary in his insistence that his operas be fully integrated and understandable for his audiences. His musical language is tonal and dramatic, and has been driven and enlarged solely by the dramatic situations and the librettos of his own imagination, achieving a seamless fusion of words and music, exactly the qualities which are the essence of great opera.

He was unique in being his own librettist, a deep and underappreciated talent that he shares with a few admittedly quite diverse gentlemen, including Richard Wagner and Stephen Sondheim. Carlisle was fascinating on the subject of libretto writing, claiming that when composer and librettist go to war in the development of his compositions, it is inevitably the librettist that wins!

Far from being a throwback, Carlisle can now accurately be seen as a revolutionary in his insistence that his operas be fully integrated and understandable for his audiences.

Carlisle Floyd had also been present for the exciting and vibrant tectonic shift in which we are currently immersed in American opera: a wealth of new operas around the country on a dizzying array of subjects, and a set of composers who in various ways owe a debt to Carlisle for his own unintentionally radical insistence that opera had an unbreakable duty to emotionally connect with its audience, and that music needn’t dumb down nor alienate in order to achieve it.

Even if the geopolitical world of our time is divisive, he thought, culture is still a place where the sharing of extraordinary stories can be a temperate middle ground. Fascinatingly, Carlisle’s opera Willie Stark, which daringly presented the duplicitious world of American politics as just another brand of show business, did so by blurring the line between opera and musical theater, worlds that were utterly segregated at the time he wrote it. Yet he had seen those worlds continually communicate with each other as the admittedly few great musicals of the later 20th century took on qualities of opera, while operatic composers slowly started to fuse many traditions of world-music into their works.

The sole unifying quality of 21st century “serious” composition is its thrilling diversity, and in this it is perfectly illustrative of our multicultural world made ever-smaller by technological conveyances unthinkable when Carlisle’s career began.

Carlisle was a shy and unassuming man, the very essence of a type of southern gentleman one might fairly associate with a lost era. He wrote letters, or emails these days, in complete and thoughtfully composed paragraphs, and he was well mannered and elegantly spoken. He was artistically uncompromising and considerably demanding, though he rarely felt so because of his gentility. If you were a friend or colleague of Carlisle Floyd, you will understand loyalty because he showed it to you. He was of a generation that believes if you have to profess a quality or value, it is because you probably lack it. If he were to be cast in a play, he would be the omniscient Stage Manager of Our Town.

There is a moment of supreme tenderness in Carlisle’s opera, Cold Sassy Tree, a short aria sung by Will Tweedy in innocent admiration of a young girl, Lightfoot, who protects him. Conducting the world premiere of this opera in Houston shortly into our new century, this was always my most treasured place in the work.

In this more egalitarian age, we no longer carve names above auditoriums, but I imagine instead that certain phrases of music fulfill the same task: vibrating forever in little corners, hovering over us in permanent watch. Great composers create this feeling, an essence of something large that is captured and held, and it is rare that I walk into an empty theater for a rehearsal when I don’t hear one of them in my memory, as I often do this one:

“So there you were, my guardian angel. Just like you’d been sent to me.... Guardian angels hover overhead just out of sight. Then when you’re in need of them they appear and spread their wings... That’s what guardian angels do.”

From the opera, Cold Sassy Tree, text and music by Carlisle Floyd. ▸
If the burden of your family’s estate settlement is keeping you up at night, then rest assured.
Ezra Jack Keats’s
Snowy Day Legacy

The story of a children’s book that broke barriers and became an abiding classic.

By Librettist Andrea Davis Pinkney
When Ezra Jack Keats created *The Snowy Day*, he took a bold leap and never looked back. Keats started his career in children’s publishing in 1954, illustrating books written by authors other than himself. As an artist who had grown up surrounded by poverty and anti-Semitism, Ezra understood what it was like to be excluded. He was a man who’d spent much of his life in New York City, living among neighbors from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Yet none of these people of color appeared in the mainstream children’s books that were being published at that time. Also missing in works of literature for young people were urban settings. Kids who lived among apartment buildings and brownstones, and whose playgrounds were made of concrete and chain-link fences, didn’t see the beauty of their urban lives reflected in the picture books they read.

When the opportunity came to create his own book, Keats didn’t have to think twice about the story’s main character. He immediately remembered a series of *Life* magazine photographs that he’d been saving for more than 20 years, for something. The strip of four pictures depict a Black child who is about to get a shot from a doctor. The boy’s facial expressions, attitude, clothing, and all-out feisty cuteness are the inspiration for that special something Keats had been waiting to portray. This was the beginning of Keats’s *The Snowy Day*, a story set in a city, and whose main character, Peter, is African American. It was 1962. This was also the start of Ezra Jack Keats’s creative exuberance that would be expressed through his body of work as an author and illustrator. Keats was a master of urban orchestration. His books celebrated the beauties of New York City’s neighborhoods. They featured street corners, front stoops, graffiti, manholes, and storefronts. They included Black and Latinx children and families, homeless people, and colorful construction workers.

In describing the joys of creating *The Snowy Day*’s multifaceted illustrations, Keats said, “I was like a child playing.” And he recalled the artistic freedom of being “in a world with no rules.”

The editor of *The Snowy Day*, Annis Duff, also pushed past convention. She rejected Keats’s first sketch for the book’s cover, which featured a large snowman. Duff was emphatic. She told Ezra that his book must feature Peter prominently on its cover. Putting a Black boy front-and-center on a picture book’s jacket was unheard of at that time, but Annis insisted. The ad copy and text of the book never mention Peter’s race, which speaks to the story’s universal celebration of every child having fun.

*The Snowy Day* is among Keats’s most notable books, a masterwork that has become a classic, enjoyed by generations of readers. It won the 1963 Caldecott Medal, the highest honor an illustrated children’s book can receive. In his Caldecott speech, Keats said, “I can honestly say that Peter came into being because we wanted him.” And Keats reminds us that Peter is timeless because he bestows “the wisdom of a pure heart.” This is why *The Snowy Day* has endured for half a century and remains relevant today.

Keats’s intention in creating *The Snowy Day* was to break down barriers. He wanted a book that would “lead all children to genuine self-acceptance.” He was deliberate about making Peter Black, while at the same time, seeking to present a protagonist who could be seen as any child, not defined by his skin color. Keats once said, “I wanted to make sure I didn’t make Peter a white kid colored brown.”

Keats succeeded in providing inspiration through his work, and in delivering a book that would become an abiding classic. At the same time, though, he faced ridicule by those who took offense to a white man presuming to be able to write a book

These photographs from the May 13, 1940 issue of *Life* magazine inspired the depiction of Peter, the main character in Ezra Jack Keats’s *The Snowy Day*. The book’s cover image featuring an African American boy was considered groundbreaking when it was published in 1962.
about a Black child. Many believed Keats himself was Black, and were disappointed or shocked to see that he was white, when they came to bookstores and libraries where Keats was autographing copies of *The Snowy Day*.

When asked why he chose to create a story with a Black protagonist, Keats’s answer was simple. He said he put Black characters into his books because they were there. His characters were inspired by the neighbors and friends he’d grown up with in his Brooklyn, New York neighborhood. Keats felt they’d always been there—but needed to be seen.

*The Snowy Day*’s historical and cultural significance remain unparalleled. Upon its publication, it was immediately embraced by educators, intellectuals, and critics. The Harlem Renaissance poet, Langston Hughes, applauded Keats’s work, referring to it as “perfectly charming.” Today, countless notables acknowledge *The Snowy Day*’s contribution to their own childhoods and the continued far-reaching effects on children everywhere. Former First Lady Michelle Obama cites *The Snowy Day* as one of her favorite childhood books, as does *Today Show* host Al Roker. The venerated writer Sherman Alexie credits Keats’s pivotal book for turning him into a reader as a child.

*The Snowy Day* has sold nearly 10 million copies worldwide. It’s been translated into 12 languages, and is considered by the Library of Congress to be one of the books that has shaped America. In a BBC poll, *The Snowy Day* was included as one of a select group of stories that has changed the world. The book was named one of the 100 Most Important Children’s Books of the 20th Century by the New York Public Library, and remains the single most checked-out book (including adult and children’s books of any subject or theme) in the New York Public Library’s 125-year history.

Keats was deeply committed to depicting children of many races, and to eliminating prejudice. He himself was the target of discrimination. Born Jacob Ezra Katz, he was the son of Polish Jews who fled anti-Semitism at the start of the twentieth century in search of a better life in America. His parents, Benjamin and Gussie, were immigrants, no different from so many refugees who come to America today searching for opportunity. In school, young Ezra won prizes for his paintings. Years later, when he returned home after serving in World War II, he couldn’t find employment. Katz was repeatedly met with signs that said “No Jews Need Apply.”

That’s when he changed his name to Ezra Jack Keats, to circumvent denial of employment due to anti-Semitism in the art field. Keats never hid his Jewish identity. He wanted a job that let him be seen for who he was. Once he had the job, that included being Jewish.

As he became a prolific illustrator of children’s books, he realized that none of the main characters were children of color. Keats made a vow to change the all-white world of content for kids. In referring to his reasons for giving Peter such prominence, Ezra Jack Keats said, “He should have been there all along.”

*This note is excerpted, in part, from the book *A Poem for Peter: Ezra Jack Keats and the Creation of the Snowy Day* by Andrea Davis Pinkney.*

To learn more about *The Snowy Day* and Ezra Jack Keats, please visit the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation website: [http://www.ezra-jack-keats.org](http://www.ezra-jack-keats.org)

Andrea Davis Pinkney is *The New York Times* bestselling and Coretta Scott King Award-winning author of numerous books for children, including *A Poem for Peter: The Story of Ezra Jack Keats and the Creation of The Snowy Day*. She is a four-time NAACP Image Award nominee and a recipient of both the Regina Medal and the Arbuthnot Honor Award, for her singular body of work and distinguished contribution to the field of literature. She has been inducted in the New York State Writers Hall of Fame. Pinkney has served on the creative teams for several theatrical and audio productions, including those drawn from her acclaimed books.
A MAGICAL STORYBOOK

The production takes inspiration from silent films.
Suzanne Andrade and Paul Barritt, co-artistic directors of British theater company 1927, collaborated with Barrie Kosky, artistic director of the Komische Oper Berlin, on the incredibly inventive production of *The Magic Flute* coming to Houston this February. HGO’s originally planned staging of the trio’s production, slated for spring 2020, was canceled by the pandemic, but now Houston audiences will finally get to experience the creators’ internationally celebrated take on Mozart’s masterpiece! Ahead of the opera’s opening, here are Kosky, Andrade, and Barritt discussing flying elephants, the world of silent film, and the eternal search for love:

**How did you come up with the idea of staging *The Magic Flute* with 1927?**

**Barrie Kosky (stage director; Intendant of the Komische Oper Berlin):** *The Magic Flute* is the most frequently performed German-language opera, one of the top ten operas in the world. Everyone knows the story; everybody knows the music; everyone knows the characters. On top of that, it is an “ageless” opera, meaning that an 8-year-old can enjoy it as much as an octogenarian can. So you start out with some pressure when you undertake a staging of this opera. I think the challenge is to embrace the heterogeneous nature of this opera. Any attempt to interpret the piece in only one way is bound to fail. You almost have to celebrate the contradictions and inconsistencies of the plot and the characters, as well as the mix of fantasy, surrealism, magic, and deeply touching human emotions.

About four years ago I attended a performance of *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, the first show created by 1927. From the moment the show started, there was this fascinating mix of live performance with animation, creating its own aesthetic world. Within minutes, this strange mixture of silent film and music hall had convinced me that these people had to do *The Magic Flute* with me in Berlin! It seemed to me quite an advantage that Paul and Suzanne would be venturing into opera for the first time, because they were completely free of any preconceptions about it, unlike me.

The result was a very unique *Magic Flute*. Although Suzanne and Paul were working in Berlin for the first time, they had a natural feel for the city’s artistic ambiance, especially the Berlin of the 1920s, when it was such an important creative center for painting, cabaret, silent film, and animated film. Suzanne, Paul, and I share a love for revue, vaudeville, music hall and similar forms of theater, and, of course, for silent film. So our Papageno is suggestive of Buster Keaton, Monostatos is a bit Nosferatu, and Pamina perhaps a bit reminiscent of Louise Brooks. But it’s more than an homage to silent film—there are far too many influences from other areas. But the world of silent film gives us a certain vocabulary that we can then use in any way that we like.

**Is your love of silent film the motivation behind the name “1927”?**

**Suzanne Andrade (stage director/performance; co-creator of 1927):** 1927 was the year of the first sound film, *The Jazz Singer* with Al Jolson, an absolute sensation at the time. Curiously, however, no one believed at that time that the talkies would prevail over silent films. We found this aspect especially exciting. We work with a mixture of live performance and animation, which makes it a completely new art form in many ways. Many others have used film in theater, but 1927 integrates film in a very new way. We don’t do a theater piece with added movies. Nor do we make a movie and then combine it with acting elements. Everything goes hand in hand. Our shows evoke the world of dreams and nightmares, with aesthetics that hearken back to the world of silent film.

**Paul Barritt (filmmaker; co-creator of 1927):** And yet it would be wrong to see in our work only the influence of the 1920s and silent film. We take our visual inspiration from many eras, from the copper engravings of the 18th century as well as in comics of today. There is no preconceived aesthetic setting in our mind when we work on a show. The important thing is that the image fits. A good example is Papageno’s aria “Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen” (“A girl or a little wife”). In the libretto, he is served a glass of wine in the dialogue before his aria. We let him have a drink, but it isn’t wine. It’s a pink cocktail from a giant cocktail glass, and Suzanne had the idea that he would start to see pink elephants flying around him. Of course, the most famous of all flying elephants was Dumbo—from the 1940s—but the actual year isn’t important as long as everything comes together visually.

**Suzanne Andrade: Our *Magic Flute* is a journey through different worlds of fantasy. But as in all of our shows, there is a connecting style that ensures that the whole thing doesn’t fall apart aesthetically.**

**Barrie Kosky:** This is also helped by 1927’s very special feeling for rhythm. The rhythm of the music and the text has an enormous influence on the animation. As we worked together on *The Magic Flute*, the timing always came from the music, even—especially—in the dialogues, which...
we condensed and transformed into silent film intertitles with piano accompaniment. However, we use an 18th-century fortepiano, and the accompanying music is by Mozart, from his two fantasias for piano, KV 475 in C minor and KV 397 in D minor. This not only gives the whole piece a consistent style, but also a consistent rhythm. It’s a silent film by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, so to speak!

**Does this piece work without the dialogue?**

**Suzanne Andrade:** I think that almost any story can be told without words. You can undress a story to the bone, to find out what you really need to convey the plot. We tried to do that in *The Magic Flute*. You can convey so much of a story through purely visual means. You don’t always need two pages of dialogue to show the relationship between two people. You don’t need a comic dialogue to show that Papageno is a funny character. A clever gimmick can sometimes offer more insight than dialogue.

**Paul Barritt:** Going back to silent films, for a moment—they weren’t just films without sound, with intertitles in place of the missing voices. Intertitles were actually used very sparingly. The makers of silent films instead told their stories through the visual elements. While talkies convey the stories primarily through dialogue, silent films told their story through gestures, movements and glances, and so on.

**Barrie Kosky:** This emphasis on the images makes it possible for every viewer to experience the show in his or her own way: as a magical, living storybook; as a curious, contemporary meditation on silent film as a singing silent film; or as paintings come to life. Basically, we have a hundred stage sets in which things happen that normally aren’t possible onstage: flying elephants, flutes trailing notes, bells as showgirls... We can fly up to the stars and then ride an elevator to hell, all within a few minutes. In addition to all the animation in our production, there are also moments when the singers are in a simple white spotlight. And suddenly there’s only the music, the text and the character. The very simplicity makes these perhaps the most touching moments of the evening.

During the performance, the technology doesn’t play in the foreground. Although Paul spent hours and hours sitting in front of a computer to create it, his animation never loses its deeply human component. You will always notice that a human hand has drawn everything. Video projections as part of theatrical productions aren’t new. But they often become boring after a few minutes, because there isn’t any interaction between the two-dimensional space of the screen and the three dimensions of the environment...
actors. Suzanne and Paul have solved this problem by combining all of these dimensions into a common theatrical language.

**What is The Magic Flute really about?**

**Paul Barritt:** It’s a love story, told as a fairy tale.

**Suzanne Andrade:** The love story between Tamino and Pamina. Throughout the entire piece, the two try to find each other—but everyone else separates them and pulls them away from each other. Only at the very end do they come together.

**Barrie Kosky:** A strange, fairytale love story, one that has a lot of archetypal and mythological elements, such as the trials they must undergo to gain wisdom. They have to go through fire and water to mature. These are ancient rites of initiation. The Masonic trappings imposed on the story interested us very little, since they have, of course, much, much deeper roots.

Tamino falls in love with a portrait. How many myths and fairy tales include this plot point? The hero falls in love with a picture and goes in search of the subject. And on his way to her, he encounters all sorts of obstacles. And, at the same time, the object of his desire faces her own personal obstacles on her own journey.

You can experience our production as a journey through the dream worlds of Tamino and Pamina. These two dream worlds collide and combine to form one strange dream. The person who combines these dreams and these worlds is Papageno. We are very focused on these three characters. Interestingly, Papageno is in pursuit of an idealized image too: the perfect fantasy woman at his side, something he craves almost desperately. Despite all of the comedic elements, there is a deep loneliness in *The Magic Flute*. Half of the piece is the fact that people are alone: Despite the joy in Papageno’s bird catcher aria, it’s ultimately about a man who feels lonely and longs for love. At the beginning of the opera, Tamino is running alone through the forest. The three ladies are alone, so they are immediately attracted to Tamino. The Queen of the Night is alone—her husband has died, and her daughter has been kidnapped. Even Sarastro, who has a large following, has no partner at his side. Not to mention Monostatos, whose unfulfilled longing for love degenerates into unbridled lust. *The Magic Flute* is about the search for love, and about the different forms that this search can take.

Finally, it is also an Orphic story—it is about the power of music, music that can move mountains and nature. After all, the opera is called *The Magic Flute*, not Tamino and Pamina! The magic flute isn’t just an instrument, it is the quintessence of music, and music, in this case, is synonymous with love. I think that’s the reason why so many people love this opera so much, because they see, hear, and feel that it’s a universal representation of those looking for love, a journey that we all take time and time again. ▸

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*—Interview by Ulrich Lenz, dramaturg. Reprinted with permission from the Komische Oper Berlin.*

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THE SNOWY DAY

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*The Snowy Day is funded in part by the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance*
MUSIC BY JOEL THOMPSON
LIBRETTO BY ANDREA DAVIS PINKNEY

THE SNOWY DAY

BASED ON THE SNOWY DAY,
A BOOK BY EZRA JACK KEATS

Dec.  09  10  11  12M  14
Dec. 15M†  16†  17  18  19M

An Opera in One Act
Based on The Snowy Day, a book by Ezra Jack Keats
Music by Joel Thompson
Libretto by Andrea Davis Pinkney

Commissioned by Houston Grand Opera; initially conceived in collaboration with Julia Bullock

Sung in English with projected English text

† Alternate cast
December 15 performance is a Student Matinee

CULLEN THEATER, WORTHAM THEATER CENTER

The performance lasts approximately 1 hour, with no intermission.

The activities of Houston Grand Opera are supported in part by funds provided by the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance and by a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts.
Quick Start Guide

Background

In 1940, Life magazine published a strip of four photos of a little Black boy in Georgia, waiting for a blood test to be administered by a nurse. Ezra Jack Keats, a children’s book illustrator, cut out those photos and hung them on his studio wall as his inspiration. In 1962, those Life magazine photos from 22 years earlier inspired Keats’s second book. Keats wrote and illustrated The Snowy Day, the story of a little boy named Peter who is finally allowed to venture into the snow alone. The book won the 1963 Caldecott Medal, and it broke a persistent color barrier: Peter was the first Black boy to be the main character of a mainstream children’s book.

In 2016, acclaimed children’s author Andrea Davis Pinkney wrote A Poem for Peter, an homage to Keats and his legacy of Peter, the little boy who simply played in the snow. She was the perfect artist to become the librettist of an opera based on The Snowy Day, which would begin to evolve only a few months later.

Star soprano Julia Bullock brought the idea of basing an opera on The Snowy Day to Patrick Summers, HGO’s Artistic and Music Director. He, too, knew the book from his childhood, and the opera started to take form. In the summer of 2017, Patrick was teaching conducting at the Aspen Music Festival, when a conducting student brought out a score from one of the festival’s composition students—within 30 seconds, Patrick knew that this unidentified composer would be the perfect fit for The Snowy Day.

Joel Thompson was that composer, and his unique and colorful musical voice has breathed new life into the story of Peter, beautifully adapted into poetic narrative by Pinkney. Eighty years after those pictures were published, the universal themes of Keats’s simple story jump off the page and into the theater for HGO’s 71st world premiere.

The Story

Peter wakes up to the first snow of winter—the first winter where his parents have promised to let him play in the snow by himself. Overjoyed at the infinite possibilities of his snowy adventures, he starts to bound outside when Mama and Daddy remind him that he has to eat breakfast and put on his snowsuit. They lovingly tease him as they draw out his bundling as long as they can before letting him go—but not without a gentle warning to be careful.

As Peter enters the snowy world alone for the first time, he innocently wishes that the snow would last forever. Three older boys start a snowball fight, but they become frustrated at Peter’s inability to keep up—they tease Peter and leave him behind. Peter meets Amy, and they play in the snow until the older boys return. One of them, Tim, stops the teasing when he sees the hurt it causes Peter and Amy. Tim plays with them until their fathers call them home. Peter quietly tucks a snowball into his pocket to bring home and keep forever.

At home, Mama helps Peter get ready for bed while Daddy leaves to work his night shift. Right before bed, Peter goes to get his snowball out of his jacket pocket, only to discover that it has melted. He dreams that his new friends and their snowy day all melt as well, until he awakens to another layer of snow and the promise of another day with his friends. Snow and childhood won’t last forever, but Peter, Amy, and Tim will enjoy both for as long as they can—together.

What to Listen for

When Peter finally gets out of the house and first steps out into his snowy wonderland, he sings an aria titled “Whisper Walk.” Completely captive to the wonder around him, Peter wants it to last forever. Listen for his melody toward the end of this aria, when he sings, “Please be forever.” That melody, joyfully called the “forever theme” in rehearsals, returns in many iterations throughout the opera, commenting on the permanence, or impermanence, of the character’s hopes and wishes.

Fun Fact

The Snowy Day has a fan in former first lady Michelle Obama, who told The New York Times it was one of her favorite books growing up. It is also the most checked-out title in the history of the New York Public Library.
CAST & CREATIVE

CAST (in order of vocal appearance)

Peter
Raven McMillon †
Kathleen Moore and Steven Homer/
Nancy Haywood Fellow
Flora Hawk *
(Dec. 15m and 16)

Mama / Ensemble Soprano 2
Karen Slack *
Aarianna B. Longino *
(Dec. 15m and 16)

Daddy / Tim / Ensemble Bass 1
Nicholas Newton ‡
Blake Denson †
(Dec. 15m and 16)
Gloria M. Portela and Richard E. Evans/
Carolyn J. Levy/Liz Grimm and Jack
Roth Fellow

Jasper / Papi / Ensemble Tenor 1
Andres Acosta
Ricardo Garcia †
(Dec. 15m and 16)
Dr. Ellen R. Gritz and Mr. Milton D.
Rosenau Jr./ Michelle Beale and
Dick Anderson Fellow

Billy / Ensemble Bass 2
Cory McGee †
Beth Madison Fellow
Hans Tashjian *
(Dec. 15m and 16)

Amy / Ensemble Soprano 1
Elena Villalón †
Mr. and Mrs. Harlan C. Stai Fellow
Maria Valdes *
(Dec. 15m and 16)

Ensemble Tenor 2
Ricardo Garcia †
Andres Acosta
(Dec. 15m and 16)

* Houston Grand Opera mainstage debut
† Houston Grand Opera Studio artist
‡ Former Houston Grand Opera Studio artist

CREATIVE TEAM

Composer  Joel Thompson *
Librettist  Andrea Davis Pinkney *
Conductor  Patrick Summers
Sarah and Ernest Butler Chair
Benjamin Manis
(Dec. 15m and 16)
Director  Omer Ben Seadia
Set Designer  Amy Rubin *
Costume Designer  Jessica Jahn
Lighting Designer  Michael James Clark
Choreographer  Courtney D. Jones
Dramaturg  Jeremy Johnson
Musical Preparation  Kevin J. Miller
Bin Yu Sanford *†
Stephanie Larsen/Dr. and Mrs. Miguel
Miro-Quesada/ Ms. Lynn Des Prez Fellow

Stage Manager  Brian August
Assistant Director  Audrey Chait

* Houston Grand Opera debut
† Houston Grand Opera Studio artist

CREATIVE CREDITS

Ann Owens, Commissioning Consultant

PRODUCTION CREDITS

English supertitles by Jeremy Johnson. Supertitles called by Emily Kern.
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, IATSE 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 IATSE, Local #51.
Wardrobe personnel provided by Theatrical Wardrobe Union, Local #896.
Scenery constructed by Dallas Scenic.
This production is being recorded for archival purposes.

A Special Thank-You
Clark Kellogg of Kellogg Furniture Design
HGO ORCHESTRA

Patrick Summers, Artistic and Music Director
Sarah and Ernest Butler Chair

VIOLIN
Denise Tarrant*, Concertmaster
Sarah and Ernest Butler Concertmaster Chair
Chloe Kim†, Assistant Concertmaster
Natalie Gaynor*, Principal, Second Violin
Carrie Kauk†, Assistant Principal Second Violin
Miriam Belyatsky†
Anabel Detrick†
Rasa Kalesnykaite†
Hae-a Lee-Barnes†
Chavdar Parashkevov†
Mary Reed†
Erica Robinson†
Linda Sanders†
Oleg Sulyga†
Sylvia VerMeulen†
Melissa Williams†

VIOLA
Eliseo Rene Salazar*, Principal
Lorento Golofeev†, Assistant Principal
Gayle Garcia-Shepard†
Erika C. Lawson†
Suzanne LeFevre†
Dawson White†

CELLO
Barrett Sills*, Principal
Erika Johnson†, Assistant Principal
Ariana Nelson†
Wendy Smith-Butler†
Steven Wiggs†

DOUBLE BASS
Dennis Whittaker†, Principal
Erik Gronfor*, Acting Principal
Carla Clark†

FLUTE
Henry Williford*, Principal Flute
Tyler Martin*

OBOE
Elizabeth Priestly Siffert†, Principal
Virginia McDowell, Acting Principal
Mayu Isom†

CLARINET
Sean Krissman*, Principal
Eric Chi†

BASSOON
Amanda Swain*, Principal
Michael Allard†

FRENCH HORN
Sarah Cranston*, Principal
Kimberly Penrod Minson*
Spencer Park†

TRUMPET
Tetsuya Lawson*, Principal
Randal Adams†

TROMBONE
Thomas Hulten†, Principal
Mark Holley†

BASS TROMBONE
Justina Bain†

TUBA
Mark Barton†, Principal

HARP
Joan Eidman†, Principal

TIMPANI
Alison Chang*, Principal

PERCUSSION
Richard Brown*, Principal

PIANO
Bin Yu Sanford

ORCHESTRA PERSONNEL MANAGER
Richard Brown*
We are thrilled that the Houston Grand Opera has adapted *The Snowy Day* into this splendid production. The Ezra Jack Keats Foundation is proud to steward Ezra's books and legacy, but this is only a part of what Ezra hoped his foundation would accomplish. Ezra wanted to “do good.” To achieve that goal, the work of the EJK Foundation is to foster children’s love of reading and creative expression by supporting arts and literacy programs in public schools and libraries and by cultivating new writers and illustrators of exceptional picture books that reflect our diverse population.

Our three major programs—the EJK Bookmaking Competition, the EJK Mini-Grant Program, and the Ezra Jack Keats Award—were designed to offer the kind of encouragement Ezra received, from his public school days to his career as an author/illustrator. Since a portion of his royalties fund our work, his books inspire children and also support these programs, showing authors, illustrators, students, and educators that their efforts are valuable and appreciated.

The Ezra Jack Keats Bookmaking Competition, currently an annual activity in public schools in New York and San Francisco, is open to children (grades 3 through 12), to write, illustrate, and construct their own books. Over and over, we hear what a life-changing experience this is, for both avid and reluctant readers.

Through the Ezra Jack Keats Mini-Grant program, approximately 70 grants are awarded to public school teachers (pre-K-12) and public librarians, in 30 to 40 states, each year. The grants, of up to $500, fund a wide range of imaginative science, art, and literacy programs in and out of the classroom. In addition to enriching curriculum, these grants honor the educators.

Through the annual Ezra Jack Keats Award, the Foundation recognizes a new illustrator and writer of outstanding children’s picture books that celebrate the diversity of our culture and the universality of the childhood experience. We aim to support the Ezras of tomorrow!

The EJK Foundation works for inclusivity and diversity in children’s literature and for quality public education. Ezra imagined a better future—our work is to help make it real.

We hope you’ll visit us at [Ezra-Jack-Keats.org](http://Ezra-Jack-Keats.org).
WHO'S WHO

EZRA JACK KEATS (1916–83) (UNITED STATES) AUTHOR, THE SNOWY DAY

Ezra Jack Keats wrote and illustrated over 20 picture books for children. He is most famous for having created the character of Peter in The Snowy Day, whose adventures continue in the many classic books that followed, including Whistle for Willie, Peter’s Chair, Pet Show, and A Letter to Amy. With Peter and his multicultural group of friends, Keats changed children’s literature in this country by bringing greater diversity into mainstream children’s book publishing. His books are popular around the world and have been translated into many languages. Libraries, schools, and even a skating rink have been named in his honor. The Snowy Day is the most checked out book in the 125-year history of the New York Public Library. It is considered a book that has shaped America by the Library of Congress, and a book that has changed the world by an international BBC poll. Keats directed that after his death the royalties from his books should be used by the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation to “do good in the world.” The EJK Foundation is happy to fulfill his wishes.

ANDREA DAVIS PINKNEY (UNITED STATES) LIBRETTIST

Andrea Davis Pinkney is The New York Times bestselling and Coretta Scott King award-winning author of numerous books for children, including A Poem for Peter: The Story of Ezra Jack Keats and the Creation of The Snowy Day. She is a four-time NAACP Image Award nominee, and recipient of both the Regina Medal and the Arbuthnot Honor Award, for her singular body of work and distinguished contribution to the field of children’s literature. Pinkney is among Children’s Health Magazine’s “25 Most Influential People in Our Children’s Lives” and has been named to The Network Journal’s “25 Most Influential Black Women in Business.” She is included in the “50 Over 50 Extraordinary Women” and “Women Who Light Up the Arts Scene” noted by Good Housekeeping and Woman’s Day magazines. She has been inducted into the New York Writers Hall of Fame, and is a contributor to The New York Times, The Huffington Post, and Essence magazine. Pinkney has served on the creative teams for several theatrical and audio productions based on works for young people, including those drawn from her acclaimed books, Martin Rising: Requiem for a King, The Red Pencil, and Rhythm Ride: A Trip through the Motown Sound. Pinkney has served in leadership and executive roles at the Walt Disney Company, Houghton Mifflin Company, Essence magazine, the CBS Magazines Group, and Simon & Schuster. She is currently Vice President, Executive Editor at Scholastic.

JOEL THOMPSON (UNITED STATES) COMPOSER

Joel Thompson is an Atlanta-based composer, conductor, pianist, and educator, best known for the choral work, Seven Last Words of the Unarmed, which was premiered in November 2015 by the University of Michigan Men’s Glee Club and Dr. Eugene Rogers and won the 2018 American Prize for Choral Composition. In August 2021 he premiered To Awaken the Sleeper in Boulder at the Colorado Music Festival; the piece sets the writings of James Baldwin to music. Thompson’s works have been performed by esteemed ensembles such as the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra, Atlanta Master Chorale, Los Angeles Master Chorale, EXIGENCE, and the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus. Currently a doctoral student at the Yale School of Music, Thompson was also a 2017 post-graduate fellow in Arizona State University’s Ensemble Lab/Projecting All Voices Initiative and a composition fellow at the 2017 Aspen Music Festival and School, where he studied with composers Stephen Hartke and Christopher Theofanidis and won the 2017 Hermitage Prize. Thompson taught at Holy Innocents’ Episcopal School in Atlanta from 2015 to 2017, and also served as Director of Choral Studies and Assistant Professor of Music at Andrew College from 2013 to 2015. Thompson has a B.A. in Music and an M.M. in Choral Conducting, both from Emory University.

PATRICK SUMMERS (UNITED STATES) CONDUCTOR

Sarah and Ernest Butler Chair

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 Tarik O’Regan’s The Phoenix, 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 Holocaust opera The Passenger, both at HGO and on tour to the Lincoln Center Festival; and nurturing the careers of such artists as Christine Goerke, Allyn Perez, 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 by Indiana University. He was recently named Co-Artistic Director of the Aspen Music Festival’s opera program alongside Renée Fleming. During the 2019-20 season at HGO, he conducted Saul and Aida. Other recent engagements included Dead Man Walking at the Israeli Opera.

**CONDUCTOR**

Conductor Benjamin Manis joined HGO as Resident Conductor in September 2019. This season with HGO, he also conducted performances of Carmen and will conduct performances of Romeo and Juliet. Recent performances at HGO include Rigoletto, El Milagro del Recuerdo, the 2020 world premiere of Marian’s Song, and the subsequent HGO Digital filmed version and Miller Outdoor Theatre performances of the same work. Manis has served as cover conductor for the St. Louis and Dallas Symphonies, working with conductors David Robertson and Stéphane Denève, and was a winner of the 2019 Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Award. Winner of the Aspen Conducting Prize, he returned to the Aspen Music Festival in summer 2021 for the fourth consecutive year. Manis has a Master of Music degree from Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music.

**COSTUME DESIGNER**

Jessica Jahn’s costumes were last seen at HGO for La favorite (2020) and Rigoletto (2019). She made her HGO debut in Mary Stuart (2012), and she returned to HGO for both West Side Story and Norma (2018)—the latter of which had previously been seen at San Francisco Opera and Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona. A selection of her past credits includes Blue for Glimmerglass Festival; Gloria: A Life with Daryl Roth Theatre; Coal Country with The Public Theatre; Norma with Canadian Opera Company and Lyric Opera of Chicago; Mary Stuart for Seattle Opera; Monodramas and Moses in Egypt for New York City Opera; Dead Man Walking for Washington National Opera; Anna Bolena for Lyric Opera of Chicago; The Manchurian Candidate at Minnesota Opera; and Moby Dick for Utah Opera and Pittsburgh Opera. Jahn is an adjunct costume design professor with Brandeis University’s Theatre Arts Department, and has taught at both New York University and Rutgers University.
Kinder HSPVA. School Summer Intensive. She is the full-time dance teacher at Dallas, Bowdoin College, Rice University, and the Joffrey Ballet initiatives including the Bates Dance Festival, Dancers Give Back her CDJ Dance Project at numerous universities, workshops, and She freelances as a guest teacher and choreographic artist through University Rice Dance Theatre, and Urban Souls Dance Company. Hope Stone Dance, MET Dance Company, SUCHU Dance, Rice and the Dance Gallery Festival. Jones has served as an adjunct Festival, Colorado Mesa University, Arlington Heights High School, and the Dance Gallery Festival. Jones has served as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Houston and taught dance for Hope Stone Dance, MET Dance Company, SUCHU Dance, Rice University Rice Dance Theatre, and Urban Souls Dance Company. She freelances as a guest teacher and choreographic artist through her CDJ Dance Project at numerous universities, workshops, and initiatives including the Bates Dance Festival, Dancers Give Back Dallas, Bowdoin College, Rice University, and the Joffrey Ballet School Summer Intensive. She is the full-time dance teacher at Kinder HSPVA.

**MICHAEL JAMES CLARK (UNITED STATES)**
LIGHTING DESIGNER

Michael James Clark is the Head of Lighting and Production Media for HGO. He was the revival lighting designer for HGO’s production of Aida (2020) and designed lighting for mainstage and Miller Outdoor Theatre productions of La bohème (2018-19) and the world premiere of The Phoenix (2019). He lit the HGOco world premieres of Some Light Emerges (2017), After the Storm (2016), and O Columbia (2015); Otello (2014); Die Fledermaus, Aida, and Il trovatore (2013); La bohème, La traviata, and The Rape of Lucretia (2012); The Marriage of Figaro (2011); the world premiere of Cruzar la Cara de la Luna (2010); and numerous outdoor productions. Michael also has designed lighting for Teatro La Fenice, San Francisco Opera, the Canadian Opera Company, Stages Repertory Theatre, Theatre Under the Stars, and Rice University.

**COURTNEY D. JONES (UNITED STATES)**
CHOREOGRAPHER / MOVEMENT DIRECTOR

Dancer, actor, educator, and choreographer Courtney D. Jones previously collaborated with HGO as movement director for Madame Butterfly (2015) and The Passenger (2014) and as a dancer in Die Fledermaus (2013) and Show Boat (2013) as a swing. She has performed in productions with Houston companies including Stages Repertory Theatre, Theatre Under the Stars, and Hope Stone Dance. Her work has been commissioned by CounterCurrent Festival, METdance Company, YES! Dance Invitational, DanceNOW Festival, Barnstorm Dance Fest, The Regional High School Dance Festival, Colorado Mesa University, Arlington Heights High School, and the Dance Gallery Festival. Jones has served as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Houston and taught dance for Hope Stone Dance, MET Dance Company, SUCHU Dance, Rice University Rice Dance Theatre, and Urban Souls Dance Company. She freelances as a guest teacher and choreographic artist through her CDJ Dance Project at numerous universities, workshops, and initiatives including the Bates Dance Festival, Dancers Give Back Dallas, Bowdoin College, Rice University, and the Joffrey Ballet School Summer Intensive. She is the full-time dance teacher at Kinder HSPVA.

**RAVEN MCMILLON (UNITED STATES)**
SOPRANO—PETER

A second-year HGO Studio artist from Baltimore, Raven McMillon was recently recognized as a 2021 Grand Finals Winner in the Metropolitan Opera's newly-branded Dominique and Eric Laffont Competition. Also for HGO's 2021-22 season, McMillon performed the role of Frasquita in Carmen this fall, and will portray Papagena in The Magic Flute. During the 2020-21 HGO Digital season, McMillon performed the roles of Rona Richards in The Impresario; Peter in The Making of The Snowy Day, an Opera for All; and Gretel in Hansel and Gretel. She also featured in the HGO Digital concert Giving Voice and performed as Sister Margaretta in HGO’s My Favorite Things: Songs From The Sound of Music. McMillon received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Vocal Performance at Carnegie Mellon University and completed her graduate degree at the University of Cincinnati College – Conservatory of Music (CCM). Her opera credits include Adele in Die Fledermaus; the title role in Goldie B. Locks and the Three Singing Bears; Linfeia in La Calisto; and Barbarina in The Marriage of Figaro. In addition to her opera credits, McMillon has also workedshopping new roles such as Mary in Chiao’s The Secret Codes of Mary Bowser and Lucy in Picker’s Awakenings. Her recent roles included La Princesse in L’enfant et les sortilèges with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Papagena in The Magic Flute at CCM in the summer of 2020, which were canceled due to COVID-19. This summer she performed the role of Frasquita in Carmen with Cincinnati Opera and Rosina in The Barber of Seville with Opera Steamboat. Later this season, she joins Opera Philadelphia in her role and company debuts as Gilda in Rigoletto and sings Pamina in The Magic Flute at Des Moines Metro Opera.

**FLORA HAWK (UNITED STATES)**
SOPRANO—PETER (DEC. 15M AND 16)

The Snowy Day marks Flora Hawk’s HGO debut. In the 2020-21 season Hawk completed her residency with Kentucky Opera’s Barbara and Halsey Sandford Studio Artist Program, where she was originally scheduled to perform Musetta in La bohème, Sandman in Hansel and Gretel, and Euridice in Gluck’s Orfeo ed Euridice, but due to COVID-19 she instead appeared in multiple innovative productions with the company. Additionally, she performed Josephine in H.M.S. Pinafore with Pensacola Opera, Sally in the premiere of
Stone Soup with Fort Worth Opera, and the leading role of Sara in the premiere of We Wear the Sea Like a Coat with Opera Ithaca. Engagements for 2021-22 include debuts as Amelia in Quamino’s Map with Chicago Opera Theater and Poppea in Agrippina with Florida Grand Opera, as well as a return to Kentucky Opera for the rescheduled performances of Euridice in Orfeo.

**ELENA VILLALÓN (UNITED STATES)**
Mr. and Mrs. Harlan C. Stai Fellow
SOPRANO—AMY

A third-year HGO Studio artist from Austin, Elena Villalón was a Grand Finals Winner of the 2019 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Second Prize winner in the 2021 Hans Gabor Belvedere International Singing Competition, and the Audience Choice Award winner in HGO’s 2019 Eleanor McCollum Concert of Arias. For HGO’s 2021-22 season, Villalón also will perform as Juliet in alternate cast performances of Romeo and Juliet. During the HGO Digital 2020-21 season she performed the roles of Farinelli’s Trainer in Vinkensport; Amy in The Making of The Snowy Day, an Opera for All; and Dew Fairy and Sandman in Hansel and Gretel. Also with HGO, she previously performed Page in Rigoletto; Woman in selected performances of the world premiere of El Milagro del Recuerdo; and Inez in La favorite. Villalón is a graduate of the University of Cincinnati College - Conservatory of Music (CCM), has been a vocal fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center, and is an alumna of HGO’s 2018 Young Artist Vocal Academy. In summer 2019, she performed Barbarina in The Marriage of Figaro at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis as a Gerdine Young Artist and returned to the Tanglewood Music Center as a soprano fellow. She returned to Opera Theatre of Saint Louis in the summer of 2021 as Lauretta in Gianni Schicchi. Also in the 2021-22 season, she makes debuts with Austin Opera (Susanna in The Marriage of Figaro) and The Dallas Opera (Tina in Flight).

**KAREN SLACK (UNITED STATES)**
SOPRANO—MAMA

Karen Slack has appeared with the Metropolitan Opera where she made her debut in the title role of Verdi’s Luisa Miller, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Washington National Opera, and San Francisco Opera. During the 2020-21 HGO Digital season, Slack appeared in HGO Digital productions The Making of the Snowy Day: An Opera for All and Giving Voice II; her role in The Snowy Day marks her mainstage debut with HGO. Engagements for the 2021-22 season include Beethoven’s Egmont with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, Aida with Opera Carolina, a recital with pianist Alan Morrison at Atlanta’s Spivey Hall, Verdi’s Requiem with the Highlander Concert Series, and a concert of arias with Omaha Symphony in collaboration with Opera Omaha. Slack’s 2020-21 season brought digital performances with HGO, Opera Philadelphia, Madison Opera, Minnesota Opera, and Driving While Black with Urban Arias. Additional highlights include Alice Ford in Faust, Leonora in Il trovatore and Tosca with Arizona Opera, Aida at Austin Opera, Emelda Griffith in Champion with New Orleans Opera, Donna Anna in Don Giovanni with Nashville Opera, Sister Rose in Dead Man Walking with Minnesota Opera and Vancouver Opera, and her Scottish Opera debut as Anna in Puccini’s Le villi. Slack portrayed a featured role in Tyler Perry’s movie and soundtrack For Colored Girls and serves as Artistic Advisor for Portland Opera, Co-Director for the 2020-21 Opera Program at the Banff Centre for the Performing Arts, and Co-Chair of the Women’s Opera Network with Opera America.

**MARIA VALDES (UNITED STATES)**
SOPRANO—AMY
(DEC. 15M AND 16)

Maria Valdes was recently described as a “first-rate singing actress and a perfectly charming Gilda” (New York Times). The Snowy Day marks her HGO debut. During the 2020-21 season, Valdes was slated to make her Hawaii Opera Theatre debut as Euridice in Offenbach’s Orpheus in the Underworld (COVID-19 cancellation). In 2021, Valdes sang the role of Younger Alyce in Glory Denied at Atlanta Opera and Berkshire Opera Festival, joined NYFOS@Home for their It’s Summer in South America recital, and joined the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra for their series of short films, In the Key of Bach. During the 2021-22 season, Valdes will make her Georgia Symphony Orchestra debut as the soprano soloist in Mahler’s Symphony No. 4, return to The Phoenix Symphony as the soprano soloist in Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9, make her Hawaii Opera Theater debut as Micaëla in Peter Brook’s La tragédie de Carmen, and return to the Bellingham Festival of Music to sing a concert of Strauss lieder.
AARIANNA B. LONGINO  
(UNITED STATES)  
SOPRANO—MAMA  
(DEC. 15M AND 16)

Aarianna B. Longino received her bachelor’s degree from Prairie View A&M University and her master’s degree from The University of Texas at Austin Butler School of Music, where she also began work on her Artist Diploma. She joined the HGO Chorus in 2019, singing in Aida and the world premiere of Marian’s Song; her role in The Snowy Day marks her principal debut with the company. Her recent performances include Suor Angelica in Suor Angelica, Erste Dame in The Magic Flute, Female Chorus in The Rape of Lucretia, Mother in The Women, Larina in Eugene Onegin, and Fiordiligi in Cosi fan tutte, for which she was recognized by the Austin Chronicle for “conveying the anguish and steadfastness in the arias.” She was scheduled to make her debut with the Houston Symphony, but that was canceled due to COVID-19.

NICHOLAS NEWTON  
(UNITED STATES)  
BASS-BARITONE —DADDY/TIM

2020-21 HGO Studio alumnus Nicholas Newton performed in HGO Digital productions The Making of The Snowy Day, an Opera for All, Giving Voice, and Marian’s Song, as well as HGO’s spring 2021 performances of Marian’s Song at Miller Outdoor Theatre. The third prize winner in HGO’s 2019 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias and an alumnus of HGO’s Young Artists Vocal Academy (2016), he also played Billy King in the world premiere of Marian’s Song (2020) and Monterone in Rigoletto (2019). During HGO’s 2021-22 season, he will also perform Friar Laurence in Romeo and Juliet. Other engagements this season include Handel’s Messiah with Indianapolis Symphony, performing Colline in La bohème with Annapolis Opera, and joining the roster at the Metropolitan Opera to cover the role of Garibaldo in Rodelinda. His notable performances include the roles of Judge Turpin in Sweeney Todd with Wolf Trap Opera, Monterone in Rigoletto with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, and both Olin Bilch in Susannah and Achilla in Giulio Cesare at Rice University. An avid concert performer and recitalist, Newton is also an alumnus of Ravinia’s Steans Music Institute and has performed as a soloist in Mozart’s Requiem, Haydn’s Lord Nelson Mass, Fauré’s Requiem, Stephen Paulus’s To Be Certain of the Dawn, Duruflé’s Requiem with San Diego Master Chorale, the world premiere of Christmas Revels with Las Colinas Symphony, and, most recently, in the Hart Institute for Women Conductors Showcase Concert with the Dallas Opera.

BLAKE DENSON  
(UNITED STATES)  
BARITONE—DADDY/TIM  
(DEC. 15M AND 16)

Second-year HGO Studio artist Blake Denson, originally from Paducah, Kentucky, was a Grand Finals Winner in the 2020 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and is a 2018 alumnus of HGO’s Young Artists Vocal Academy (YAVA). Also for HGO’s 2021-22 season, Denson performed the role of Morales in Carmen and will portray Jailer in Dialogues of the Carmelites and Gregorio in Romeo and Juliet. During the 2020-21 HGO Digital season he appeared in Giving Voice; Hansel and Gretel as Peter; and Suite Española: Explorando Iberia. He obtained his Bachelor of Music in voice degree from the University of Kentucky School of Music and completed his Master of Music degree at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music. Denson was a studio artist at Wolf Trap Opera in 2018 and was set to return to Wolf Trap Opera for a second season in the summer of 2020 to perform the Commander and cover the title role in Eugene Onegin, as well as cover the role of Marcello in La bohème, but those productions were canceled due to COVID-19.

ANDRES ACOSTA  
(UNITED STATES)  
TENOR—PAPI/JASPER

Cuban American tenor Andres Acosta made his HGO debut as Father Matias in the alternate cast of El Milagro del Recuerdo in the 2019-20 season. In the 2021-22 season, Acosta opens the Minnesota Opera season in Ópera Afuerta, a special outdoor concert celebrating Latinx vocal music. He returns to Madison Opera as Edgardo in Lucia di Lammermoor, and makes his debut at Florida Grand Opera reprising the role of Timothy Laughlin in Fellow Travelers. Acosta workshops the role of the Pigeon Keeper in Santa Fe Opera’s commission of The Pigeon Keeper by David Hanlon and Stephanie Fleischmann before joining the roster of the Metropolitan Opera for the first time, covering the role of Un héraut royal in Don Carlos. During the 2019-20 season, Acosta made his Ravinia Festival debut in Bernstein’s Mass, his Atlanta Opera debut as Alejandro in Frida, reprised the role of Arcadio in Florencia en el Amazonas in his house debut with Pittsburgh Opera, and reprised the role of Timothy Laughlin in Fellow Travelers in his house debut with Madison Opera. Acosta’s 2018-19 season included his highly acclaimed portrayal of Timothy Laughlin in Minnesota Opera’s production of Fellow...
Travelers by Greg Spears, and his reprisal of the role of Arcadio in *Florence en el Amazonas* with Pensacola Opera. Acosta is a recipient of Opera America’s 2018 Career Blueprints grant and a Gerda Lissner and Sullivan Foundation Award semifinalist. He received an Encouragement Award as a Central Region finalist for the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 2017 and won awards in the Dorothy Lincoln-Smith Competition and the National Society of Arts and Letters Competition. He was awarded the Judy George Junior Young Artist First Prize Award in the 2015 Young Patronesses of the Arts competition and is recognized as a Brauchle Estate Endowed and Music Guild Scholar. He also competed as a semifinalist in HGO’s Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias in 2019.

**RICARDO GARCIA**

(UNITED STATES)

Dr. Ellen R. Gritz and Mr. Milton D. Rosenau Jr./Michelle Beale and Dick Anderson Fellow

TENOR—PAPI/JASPER

(DEC. 15M AND 16)

A second-year HGO Studio artist from Castro Valley, California, Ricardo Garcia completed his Master of Music in Voice at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music (SFCM) and holds a Bachelor of Music in Voice from the University of the Pacific. Also for HGO’s 2021-22 season, Garcia performed the role of El Remendado in Carmen and will portray First Commissioner in Dialogues of the Carmelite and Romeo in alternate cast performances of Romeo and Juliet. During the 2020-21 HGO Digital season he appeared in Winkensport as Hans Schäfer’s Trainer; The Making of The Snowy Day, an Opera for All; and Suite Española: Explorando Iberia. He was a studio artist at Wolf Trap Opera, where he played La Voce in Mozart’s Idomeneo and Ranger Nat in David Hanlon’s children’s opera, Listen, Wilhelminal, and was a soloist in “Bernstein at 100 – A Celebration.” Recent engagements include Don Basilio in The Barber of Seville (Opera on the James); the title role in The Marriage of Figaro and Pandolfe in Massenet’s Cendrillon (Oberlin Opera Theater); and Leporello in The Barber of Seville (Oberlin Opera Theater).

**CORY MCGEE**

(UNITED STATES)

Beth Madison Fellow

BASS—BILLY

A second-year HGO Studio artist from Stafford, Virginia, Cory McGee completed his Master of Music degree at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music. He was the second prize winner in HGO’s 2020 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. During HGO’s 2021-22 season, he also will perform the role of the Duke of Verona in Romeo and Juliet. During the 2020-21 HGO Digital season he appeared in The Making of The Snowy Day, an Opera for All as Billy, and in Giving Voice. In summer 2019, he joined Santa Fe Opera as an apprentice artist, portraying the role of the Gardener in Ruder’s The Thirteenth Child. In 2018 he was a studio artist with Wolf Trap Opera, where he played La Voce in Mozart’s Idomeneo and Ranger Nat in David Hanlon’s children’s opera, Listen, Wilhelminal, and was a soloist in “Bernstein at 100 – A Celebration.” Recent engagements include Don Basilio in The Barber of Seville (Opera on the James); the title role in The Marriage of Figaro and Pandolfe in Massenet’s Cendrillon (Oberlin Opera Theater); and Leporello in Don Giovanni (Oberlin in Italy). He returned to Santa Fe this summer as an apprentice artist for the second time, performing the role of Theseus in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Later this season, he will make debuts with Michigan Opera Theater and Florentine Opera as Colline in La bohème.

**HANS TASHJIAN**

(UNITED STATES)

BASS—BILLY

(DEC. 15M AND 16)

Hans Tashjian, a bass whose voice has been described as “rumbling and sumptuously lush,” and “hauntingly striking,” continues to expand his repertoire with opera companies throughout the country. The Snowy Day marks his HGO debut. During the 2021-22 season, he joins Teatro Nuovo as the title role in The Barber of Seville, The Metropolitan Opera as the Pit Singer bass 1 and 2 cover, and the New Haven Symphony Orchestra as the bass soloist in The Creation. In the spring of 2021, Tashjian returned to Sarasota Opera to cover the roles of Batone in L’inganno Felice, Uberto in La verga padrona, and Gaudenzio in Il signor Bruschino. Tashjian is an alumnus of the Yale School of Music, Manhattan School of Music, and Carnegie Mellon University, where he received the Derdeyne Award in Voice. He has fulfilled young artist residencies with Central City Opera, Sarasota Opera (where he was awarded the Scheininger-Reznick Scholarship and the 2017 Outstanding Returning Studio Artist Award), Chautauqua Opera, and the Caramoor Music Festival.
The Ezra Jack Keats Foundation applauds the Houston Grand Opera!

For creating works that welcome a more diverse audience to this glorious artform.

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2022 EJK Award Winners announced on Tuesday, March 14

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At last:

THE SNOWY DAY!

How this HGO-commissioned world-premiere opera came to be.

By Patrick Summers, Artistic and Music Director, Houston Grand Opera
How do new operas find their way to us? Unless you are following closely, it could be surprising to learn that anyone is still writing operas. Composing an opera feels like such a 19th century thing to do, like making horseshoes or being an elevator operator. But rest assured, opera lover, new ones are being created all the time. Quite a lot of them, actually, pandemic-be-damned, and they reflect the extraordinary musical diversity of contemporary composers.

But how do these new operas happen? Ultimately, they happen for the same reason Mozart wrote The Marriage of Figaro: they can’t not happen—a composer has such a burning engine inside that they must compose—nothing would stop the opera Figaro, not a ban on the play, and not even being told it could never be performed or commissioned.

Passion may write operas, but only a good deal of money gets them put on. Composing is the poetry, and a commission is the prose.

A commission is a contract and mutual agreement between a producing company like HGO and the creative mind of a composer plus all the attendant creatives necessitated by their creation: librettist, designers, singers, conductor, director, marketers, and all the money to pay for them must be raised by the non-profit producing company. Operas cost more than they will likely ever make, so love must play a large role in any opera. We commission and compose for the same reason: we love the creation itself.

Houston Grand Opera has a long tradition of replenishing the operatic repertoire with works of our own time—we call them “world premieres,” an admittedly odd term, for in what world would they premiere but this one? Premieres connect us to the legacy of the art form, for the storied premieres of classical music are touchstones of history—we love the sense of having been there for the launching of a creation. The emphasis on operatic premieres in the 21st century contrasts with how often we repeat the standard repertory, those 15-20 operas that large audiences recognize as opera: Aida, Tosca, La traviata, Carmen. For many, an opera season just isn’t appealing without them—still others have seen plenty of Bohèmes in their life and are eager to see something new. HGO has a responsibility to all those desires.

The tradition of HGO premieres started in the early 1970s with the appointment of David Gockley as the company’s General Director. New musical roads have continued to be traveled throughout my artistic directorship and will continue further, in new and exciting directions, with Khori Dastoor’s exciting recent appointment as HGO’s General Director. New operas are the most important work we do, for what could be more vital than creating the works of the future?

This feels especially true in this pandemic recovery season, in which the most exciting opera is unquestionably our youngest one, The Snowy Day by composer Joel Thompson, with a libretto by Andrea Davis Pinkney based on Ezra Jack Keats’s iconic 1962 children’s book.

Like many new works, The Snowy Day had a circuitous path to this December of 2021. I first heard the music of Joel Thompson at the Aspen Music Festival in the summer of 2017, and the memory is indelible. I knew within 30 seconds of hearing his orchestral work, An Act of Resistance, that I was in the presence of a major compositional voice. How does one know these things? Know is probably the wrong verb, for one never knows anything in art except the most mundane things. That said, there are qualitative differences between Mozart or Verdi and the hundreds of composers who were their contemporaries, and these differences are not just history’s caprice—they really were, on artistic merit alone, that good.

So is Joel Thompson: great composers have music as their primary mode of expression, and they ultimately need nothing else to speak for them. They engage with the world, reflect on it, and express it as music, not music that is about other music nor music that needs description to understand, but right at that spiritual core of “this is me.” Composers like Joel find universality, yet they are also totally unique. This is Joel Thompson: his music is already universal, very
assured, and honest even at his young age, and music emanates from every aspect of his existence. He often doesn’t realize what he’s written until he’s written it, and this is a universal quality of greatness, too: it isn’t planned—it just is. Real talent is both unaware of itself and perfectly secure.

The American soprano Julia Bullock, based in Germany, was the initial impetus of The Snowy Day, until the pandemic made her participation impossible, both for the original premiere date of December 2020 and the workshop and HGO Digital documentary we planned to replace the canceled live performances. In a discussion of potential future projects, a conversation that happened at least six years ago, it was Julia who originally mentioned to us that she had always dreamed of an opera on the children’s book The Snowy Day. Immediately the idea sputtered to life; not all ideas do.

Her mention of The Snowy Day transported me back to my 1960s early childhood in Indiana, when my parents had me enrolled in a children’s book club, and the monthly arrival of a book was always a big thrill. I can still remember the feeling of opening The Snowy Day, and I’m sure my parents have preferred to forget my nightly demands to have it read to me multiple times, requests that went on for months. I’m sure we collectively read it 1,000 times.

I mentally filed away Julia’s Snowy Day wish. At the Aspen class where I first heard the music of Joel Thompson, I immediately wrote in my omnipresent notebook, “Snowy Day?” as well as, “what a great composer!” When the class finished, I asked to meet Joel. We stepped outside, sat under an Aspen tree, and started talking. Discussing many things and ideas, I mentioned to him The Snowy Day. He lit up with recognition, as it hit a memory for him, too. He asked for some time, as he is not an impetuous sort of person, and after several weeks he called and agreed to bring The Snowy Day to the world as an opera.

But wait…it’s not that easy. For a work of intellectual property still in copyright, the rights to adapt it must be negotiated with whomever owns it—in this case, the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation. Sometimes, the rights for a property are simply impossible to obtain, and this has happened several times with operas we wanted to commission. What would make the rights difficult? The first responsibility of someone who owns intellectual property is to protect it, and some view any musicalizing to be against the wishes of the original author—this is a fairly common eventuality in seeking stage rights for musicals or operas. Often, they are holding out for a movie and don’t want any competition. Always, there is the question of the fair distribution of money. Obtaining rights is often very time-consuming, as it was with The Snowy Day.

But once those rights were obtained and everything was in place, the creative work on the opera began, and it progressed quickly. Andrea Davis Pinkney turned in a beautiful libretto that we all loved, and it is important to recognize how challenging it is to write a libretto on The Snowy Day. Keats’s book is sparse and can be read in a couple of minutes. The main character, Peter, says nothing in the book at all. The experience of the book is more visual than verbal. It is gentle and comforting, all nice qualities, but lacks the engine of stage works: conflict. Andrea had the challenge of creating language for each of these characters, making them real, providing conflict and resolution—all of which she achieved with a poet’s insight and a dramatist’s tautness. She turned this symbolic book into a set of characters and gave it a dramatic arc. The opera was workshoped at Yale University, and HGO’s superb dramaturg Jeremy Johnson has played a huge role in shepherding this work to its present form. I am delighted that emerging soprano and HGO Studio artist Raven McMillon is taking the Cullen Theater stage as Peter in her first leading role with the company.

So now, fellow opera lovers, nearly sixty years after the book came into the world, six years after an opera on it was first conjured in a conversation, four years after I met Joel, three years after we secured the rights, two years after it was written, and one year after it was supposed to premiere, it is time for The Snowy Day to finally reach our stage.
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- **The Buddies Program** supports visiting performers and Studio Artists through special friendships. You can “adopt” a budding artist with the HGO Studio and be their in-town family. Call 713-546-0269 for more information.

- **The Young Artists Vocal Academy (YAVA) Program** allows you to meet young opera professionals who will be attending Houston Grand Opera’s vocal performance immersion program in May, 2022. Call 713-546-0269 for more information.

- **The HGO Guild’s Boutique** is a pop-up store in the Wortham’s grand foyer that offers opportunities to show your interest in merchandising, retail sales, cashiering, and teamwork! The HGO Guild’s Boutique’s proceeds are used to fund many of HGO’s opera programs. Contact Kris at ktaylor2106@sbcglobal.net.

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HGO’s production of Carmen featuring Ana María Martínez and Brandon Jovanovich. Photo by Lynn Lane.

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OUT of CHARACTER

By Kyle Russell, HGO Editorial Manager
Soprano Karen Slack likes to stay busy. In 2020 she became Artistic Advisor for Portland Opera, Co-Director of the 2020-21 Opera Program at the Banff Centre in Alberta, Canada, and a member of the Board of Directors for the American Composers Orchestra in New York City. In addition to these roles, this season she’ll be performing on stages across the country, including making her HGO mainstage debut as Mama in The Snowy Day.

She has worked with HGO previously, however: during the first HGO Digital season, Slack appeared in The Making of the Snowy Day, a documentary on the world-premiere opera, as well Giving Voice II, a celebration of Black artists in opera. Her other digital work during the pandemic includes Driving While Black with Urban Arias, a film the Washington Post called “an examination of Black motherhood in America that more people need to see,” and #KikiKonversations, the popular weekly live talk show she hosted on her Facebook page.

With anticipation building for the world premiere of The Snowy Day, we caught up with Slack to chat about her return to the stage.

With your digital performances and recent film work, you’ve spent a lot of time in front of the camera. Now that you’re going to be returning to live performances, what is it about being on stage again that you’re most looking forward to?

First, the interaction with my colleagues onstage and in the rehearsal room is one of the things I’ve missed the most, so getting back to that will be wonderful. But the sound of the voices and orchestra in the hall is what I am most excited to hear again. I think I might cry in the sitzprobe.

How would you describe being part of a world-premiere performance?

There is nothing like being the first artist to premiere a new work. It is like birthing a baby into the world. You work countless hours learning the score, breathing life into this new role, and getting it on its feet for the first time. It is scary and thrilling at the

Slack singing the role of Violetta in La traviata with Sacramento Opera
same time, because you have no idea how the audience will receive it in comparison to, say, the staples of standard repertoire like *La bohème* or *Tosca*. I’ve had the opportunity to create one other opera role—Billie in Terence Blanchard’s *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* at the Opera Theatre of St. Louis in 2019—and have commissioned several composers to write new songs for me all throughout my career, so I always embrace the chance to create fresh new music and characters, because I get to put my stamp on it first!

**You’ve done a lot of advocacy work in your career. Can you share some details about why that’s important to you? How do you integrate that into your career as a performer?**

I never embraced the title of “advocate” until 2020. I just do what it is I’ve always done, which is to be of service to others and my art form: creating space for others to blossom and always bringing more people into any space where I have power.

My advocacy work during the pandemic, whether through the creation of my acclaimed Facebook Live show #KikiKonversations, where we tackled issues in our industry during the pandemic, or the work I’ve done with Women’s Opera Network at Opera America, where I advocate for women in leadership with the emphasis on those of us of color—it all has been centered around the commitment I made to myself to be the thing you wish you’d had throughout your career.

**The book that this new opera is based on is a cultural treasure. What made you want to take on this role?**

In addition to the fact that I love creating new roles, this will be my HGO debut! It was a no-brainer!

**Can you tell us about the character you play, Mama?**

Joel Thompson wrote a glorious score and gave me a beautiful and deeply moving aria. Mama is like any other mother who loves her kid immensely and worries about him going out into the world for the first time by himself. What I love most about my role is the interaction between the family. You never get to witness Black families who love and laugh with one another on an opera stage without some type of traumatic event as part of the story. It is a breath of fresh air to just see real joy and, most importantly, love from parents to their child.

**What do you hope that audiences get out of your performance?**

I hope the audience feels the warmth and love of my voice and my performance, but what I hope for most is that they embrace the gift that is composer Joel Thompson and librettist Andrea Davis Pinkney. They crafted a beautiful opera that I hope becomes a staple in every opera house all over the world.
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THE POWER

An adorable Black child, on the page and on the stage.

By HGO Dramaturg Jeremy Johnson

Editor’s note: This article is the second in a four-part series examining race and representation in opera. The first installment appeared in the Cues edition for Carmen, discussing the title character’s representation as a Romani woman. The next two installments will appear in Cues editions for The Magic Flute and Turandot.

The previous installment in this series offered up a dilemma: inauthentic representations in classic operas often perpetuate harmful stereotypes of non-Western European cultures. "But the music is so good, and the emotions are universal," we say, unwilling to admit to ourselves that our beloved artform has caused harm. There’s a raging debate now in the industry: is opera racist? I gingerly fall on the side of “no”—opera is a medium of expression, and I’m not sure that a medium of expression can inherently be racist—but, with a caveat: this medium of expression has been used to perpetuate racism and racist stereotypes. The history is what the history is, and we can’t change that. But we can change our present and our future. Enter scene: new works.

One of many possibilities for addressing our dilemma is to commission new works. HGO has a long history of doing just that, The Snowy Day being the company’s 70th world premiere in our 66-year history. Authentic representations, told by creators of all backgrounds, can broaden not just the operatic repertoire, but also who we see on the stage and our own perspective on the universality of the human condition. Operatic emotions can indeed be universal, if more of us have a seat at the table.

The 1962 children’s book by Ezra Jack Keats, The Snowy Day, offers a compelling frame of reference. When Keats published this story of a little Black boy playing in the snow, it was the first book to break the color barrier in children’s literature, featuring a child...
of color as the primary protagonist. There were others that hadn’t entered mainstream publishing, such as *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, originally published in 1923, but this and its counterparts perpetuated the same dilemma of inauthentic representation.

Langston Hughes criticized these as “pickaninny stories,” harmful to Black children because of the racist stereotypes depicted in the books and their illustrations. *The Snowy Day* received its fair share of criticism, interestingly, from two relatively opposing perspectives. The first: how could Keats, a white Jewish man, presume to write a story about a Black child? The second: why didn’t Keats, a man who had the opportunity to publish mainstream children’s books at a time when Black authors often didn’t, go even further in making Peter’s race a powerful statement in the civil rights era?

The latter criticism diminished when civil rights activists saw the immense impact the book had. *The Snowy Day* won the Caldecott Medal in 1963 and was wholly embraced by parents, teachers, and children of all races and backgrounds. Andrea Davis Pinkney, the librettist of our opera, remembers growing up with the book:

“When I read *The Snowy Day* as a child, I saw a reflection of my brown-skinned self, celebrated through Peter’s sense of wonder and discovery. I think I slept with my copy of *The Snowy Day*. That’s how much the book meant to me! It was like a bed pillow.”

Another story from the book’s early days illustrates the importance of representation. Keats received many letters from the book’s admirers, and one teacher wrote, “The kids in my class, for the first time, are using brown crayons to draw themselves. These are African-American children. Before this, they drew themselves with pink crayons. But now, they can see themselves.”

Now, the other criticism Keats received—that of presuming to write about a Black child when he himself was not Black—is a criticism that has subsided for *The Snowy Day* due to its positive impact, but is one that has recently been amplified, and not just in opera. Each medium of artistic expression, including movies, battles with the debate of “who gets to tell whose story.” Would publishers even allow Ezra Jack Keats to write *The Snowy Day* in 2021? Would this world premiere opera be resisted if the composer and librettist were not Black artists?

Pinkney, who is not only a bestselling, award-winning author but also a publishing executive based in New York, offers a great perspective: “When Ezra Jack Keats created *The Snowy Day*, he did so, in part, with a mission of bringing more diversity to children’s literature. That goal remains among the community of children’s book creators and publishers. The story and depiction of Peter come from Keats’s lived experience of growing up in Brooklyn. He chose to make Peter Black to depict the neighbors and friends on his street. If *The Snowy Day* were published today, its universal impact and importance would be the same—the story’s celebration of enchantment and wonder. Now, however, the book could be edited by a person of color working in the publishing house. The marketing and promotion of the book would have Black people weighing in. The art director would be Black. The editor would enlist an authenticity reader to ensure that the visual and written "When I read *The Snowy Day* as a child, I saw a reflection of my brown-skinned self, celebrated through Peter's sense of wonder and discovery. I think I slept with my copy of *The Snowy Day*. That's how much the book meant to me! It was like a bed pillow."
representations accurately portrayed a Black child and his family. In the early 1960s there were virtually no Black people working in children’s book publishing or having a voice in these conversations. Thankfully, that’s changing.”

Add another layer to this: we all have an artistic imperative to truly empathize with one another, despite our differences in lived experiences. I recall a panel many years ago in which an opera librettist lamented the emphasis on telling stories only about one’s own experiences: to paraphrase, and to obscure the identity, “Am I only allowed to write operas about 43-year-old white women who grew up in rural Minnesota with a single mother?” The sentiment is convincing but misses a broader perspective that speaks to where we are right now: throughout opera’s history, artists of color have been systematically prevented from telling any story, let alone their own. If opera companies continue to tell stories of people of color without including artists of color in those stories’ creations, is that not systematically preventing certain artists from joining the operatic table? How do we then claim universality? Perhaps there is a future in which any artist of any background can tell any story without criticism; but until every medium of artistic expression creates an environment where all artists and creators are equitably represented, that future will elude us.

Let’s briefly add one more layer to this conversation: do our thoughts change about the above if the story is not “about” a character’s race? And how does one determine that? The Snowy Day book was not explicitly about the Black experience; it was about the childhood experience. Deborah Pope, Executive Director of the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation, commented on the fact that nowhere in the text does Keats mention that Peter is African-American, saying to NPR’s All Things Considered, “It wasn’t the point. The point is that this is a beautiful book about a child’s encounter with snow, and the wonder of it.”

New operatic commissions provide the perfect opportunity to supplement and complement our existing repertoire, to bring more artists to the operatic table, and to broaden our perspective on the universality of the human condition. That’s what the operatic artform is all about. And if we want an ideal future in which artistic empathy thrives regardless of background or lived experience, we must actively work to create an environment where all artists and creators are equitably represented. As Joel Thompson said in a recent Cues interview, “If everyone in a community can see and hear themselves on stage, and in the creative team, and play a part in sharing and holding space for each other’s stories, opera can become the space where we connect in an age of increasing isolation. That’s the future I’d like to see.”
CAST FORWARD
HGO Studio artists take center stage in *The Snowy Day*.
By HGO Studio Director Brian Speck

This inaugural production of *The Snowy Day* is an occasion for celebration and recognition of the artists of the HGO Studio, who make up much of the opera’s cast. Second-year Studio soprano Raven McMillon premieres the leading role of Peter, alongside studio colleagues Elena Villalón (Amy) and Cory McGee (Billy), as well as recent studio alumnus Nicholas Newton (Daddy/Tim). In alternate-cast performances, Blake Denson plays the roles of Daddy/Tim, and Ricardo Garcia takes on Papi/Jasper. Studio pianist Bin Yu Sanford assisted in the rehearsal of the production and plays the piano in the orchestra.

When I talk to young artists who aspire to join the Studio one day, I often ask what draws them to HGO. High on their list is the company’s commitment to creating the future through new works. Young singers are inspired by thinking about the future of opera, and they’ve always seen HGO as a company that is leading the way. As the Studio endeavors to train tomorrow’s stars, it is important to be forward-thinking and prepare artists for what may await them. For members of the HGO Studio, creating new works deepens their personal artistry, challenges them to expand their skills, and provides a creative outlet that is inspiring and influential.
As with most new works, The Snowy Day first came to life in a workshop, held during the company's 2019-20 HGO Digital season. This intensive period of work involved most of this year's cast, including each of the Studio artists playing a role in the production. Workshops are a time for the composer, librettist, director, and other members of the creative team to exercise their creative muscles and experiment. Singers, musicians, and others who will play a role in the production take a flexible approach, exploring the characters and the music together. This creative incubator is an inspiring time for everyone involved but has special meaning for young artists who are developing their own artistic voice.

Raven McMillon's debut as Peter is a landmark in her young career. From the standpoint of artist development—the main reason for the HGO Studio's existence—the opportunity can't be overstated. During last year's workshop and this year's rehearsal period, her artistry and technique grew each day as she committed to bringing Peter to life on stage. Because the operatic canon is made up primarily of historical works, singers typically do not have the advantage of talking to the work's composer and librettist, asking questions, and discussing their ideas and vision. Raven and her castmates worked very closely with Joel Thompson and Andrea Davis Pinkney as the piece was rehearsed, gaining deep insight into the opera's inner workings. With the intricate knowledge the performers have gained, they are able to make strong artistic decisions as the work comes to life.

In addition to inspiration, new music also brings challenges that drive the expansion of an artist's skills. When preparing historic works, singers and coaches have access to a wealth of resources, including recordings of the work, writings on the opera and composer, and easy access to the full orchestral score for reference and study. Following a workshop, some materials may be available for a new opera, but it is largely left to the artists and their coaches to learn the work without these tools. Especially if the music is challenging (as new works often are), this can be a test of an artist's musicianship and focus. Although the composer will often meticulously mark the score with tempi and other musical instructions, artists must rely solely on their musical skills to decipher and practice those markings in preparation. The musical exercise of learning a new work stretches an artist in a multitude of ways, and the advanced skills that are built through the process become a critical part of their toolbox.

HGO has a rich history of casting Studio artists in new works. Nearly 25 years ago, in 1998, Mark Adamo's Little Women premiered with a cast that starred Studio artists Joyce DiDonato as Meg, Chad Shelton as Laurie, and Daniel Belcher as John Brooke. Both the opera and the artists have gone on to great success. More recently, the late Carlisle Floyd's final opera, Prince of Players, premiered at HGO with a cast made entirely of Studio artists and alumni, including Ben Edquist and Mané Galoyan in the leading roles of Edward Kynaston and Margaret Hughes. The awe with which Ben, Mané, and the rest of their cast approached Carlisle Floyd in rehearsals was only surpassed by the composer's own generosity and love for the artists and their work, and the opera was a defining experience that the 2015-16 HGO Studio will carry with them for the rest of their careers.

Today, you'll experience a production that will have great significance in the artistic careers of this cast, and for which they'll be noted for a long time to come. We are proud that the DNA of The Snowy Day includes the voices of this generation of HGO Studio artists.
HGO STUDIO ARTISTS 2021–22

Raven McMillon, soprano  
Kathleen Moore and Steven Homer/  
Nancy Haywood Fellow

Elena Villalón, soprano  
Mr. and Mrs. Harlan C. Stai Fellow

Sun-Ly Pierce, mezzo-soprano  
Mr. and Mrs. Charles G. Nickson/  
John Serpe and Tracy Maddox Fellow

Emily Treigle, mezzo-soprano  
Mr. and Mrs. James W. Crownover/  
Mr. Veer Vashita Fellow

Ricardo García, tenor  
Dr. Ellen R. Gritz and  
Mr. Milton D. Rosenau Jr./Michelle Beale  
and Dick Anderson Fellow

Eric Taylor, tenor  
Jill and Allyn Risley/ Sharon Ley Lietzow  
and Robert Lietzow/Drs. Rachel and  
Warren A. Ellsworth IV Fellow

Blake Denson, baritone  
Gloria M. Portela and Richard E. Evans/  
Carolyn J. Levy/Liz Grimm and  
Jack Roth Fellow

Luke Sutliff, baritone  
Lynn Giesel/Brenda Harvey-Traylor Fellow

Cory McGee, bass  
Beth Madison Fellow

William Guanbo Su, bass  
Anne and Albert Chao Fellow

Alex Munger, pianist/coach  
Gary Hollingsworth and Ken Hyde/  
Trey Yates/Dr. Saúl and  
Ursula Balagura Fellow

Bin Yu Sanford, pianist/coach  
Stephanie Larsen/  
Dr. and Mrs. Miguel Miro-Quesada/  
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As the Houston Astros hit high home runs, Houston Grand Opera hit all the high notes with our own October doubleheader celebrating a return to live opera with two spectacular Special Events. First, superstar tenor Jonas Kaufmann brought down the house with a historic concert, An Evening with Jonas Kaufmann, accompanied by Patrick Summers and the HGO Orchestra and ending with five(!) encores in his first-ever performance in Texas. The evening, presented by Louise G. Chapman, was capped off by a dinner with Kaufmann at the Four Seasons. Just two weeks later, 370 opera lovers kicked off the 2021-22 season and welcomed new HGO General Director Khori Dastoor with an inspired Opening Night Dinner Celebration, chaired by Betty and Jess Tutor, following the first performance of Carmen. The joy surrounding the return to live grand opera after 20-plus months was palpable! Together the events raised $1.3 million.
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Updates from a busy season full of learning and collaboration

Community Partner Spotlight: Discovery Green

Since 2018, HGOco and downtown’s Discovery Green have partnered on a host of programs, from spring break camps and activities to our original commission Harmony of Trees, which interacted with the park’s site-specific installation “Hello, Trees!”

A highlight of this partnership has been Carols on the Green, our annual holiday singalong concert and celebration on the Anheuser Busch stage. This event is a cornerstone program of HGO’s Seeking the Human Spirit initiative, created to deepen Houstonians’ connections to the universal themes within opera and art.

In 2020, when live performances weren't possible, HGOco and Discovery Green worked side by side to continue our holiday tradition with a virtual concert, which was viewed by over 6,000 Houstonians—10 times the number that typically attend in person!

This year we are thrilled to bring Carols on the Green back to Houston as a live event at Discovery Green at 7:30 p.m. on December 11. —Emily Wells, HGOco Senior Producing Manager

The Return of the Student Performance Series

HGOco was devastated that the Student Performance Series had to be canceled entirely during the 2020-21 season because of COVID. We were so excited to get back to hosting students at the Wortham on October 26 of this year.

We brought over 1,800 students downtown for an incredible evening at the Opera during High School Night for our performance of Bizet’s Carmen. Most of the students who joined us were experiencing live opera for the very first time! Ten area districts participated, including Nederland High School, an hour and a half away!

We can’t wait to bring students back for our Student Matinee performances of The Snowy Day this December 15 and Romeo and Juliet on May 5, 2022. —Karen Mata, HGOco Operations Manager

Carolyn Sproule performing the title role in Carmen, 2021

HGO Studio alumnus Geoffrey Hahn singing a carol
A Masterclass with Ana María Martínez

On September 11, 2021, the Bauer Family High School Voice Studio students had their first masterclass of the season, led by HGO Artistic Advisor and celebrated soprano Ana María Martínez. The class originally was planned as an in-person event, but due to the rise in the Delta variant, the program had to quickly shift to a virtual format. We’re happy to report that that didn’t stop our students from giving beautiful performances, with the help of pre-recorded accompaniment by Bethany Self.

Seniors Samantha Pape, Jackie Hickman, Victoria Cerda, and Nicholas Mathew—all returning members of the program—learned tips for proper technique and diction from the renowned soprano. At the close of the class, all nine students had the chance to ask Martínez questions about her career as a singer, how to choose a good undergraduate voice program, and common mistakes to avoid along the way. —Kathleen Brown, HGOco Interim Education Manager

Aarianna Longino: On Stage and in the Community

In addition to singing in the HGO Chorus and serving as an HGOco Teaching Artist, this season soprano Aarianna Longino is singing in the alternative cast for The Snowy Day as Mama and creating a Storybook Opera program based on the book, all while pursuing her Doctorate of Education at Sam Houston State University and working part-time in their administrative offices. Somewhere in between all these pursuits, she found the time to chat with us about her dual roles as artist and community educator.

What made you want to be a singer?

From a young age, I have been surrounded by different genres of music. We are what you call a “singing family,” where just about everyone sings. My grandmother, who is also classically trained, started placing me in talent shows and having me perform on stages very young. This is where I truly found my passion for music, but it wasn’t until my middle school choir teacher encouraged me to explore opera that I realized it was the genre I wanted to pursue. I listened to Leontyne Price sing for the first time, and I knew I wanted to be a singer at that moment.

You hold a bachelor’s degree in Vocal Performance from Prairie View A&M and a master’s degree in Voice and Opera from the UT Butler School of Music. What led you to pursue a Doctorate of Education?

Even throughout my matriculation through both of my current degrees, I always knew that I wanted to combine my background in music with education. Some of the most influential people in my life were music teachers and professors. I keep in contact with my music teachers from middle school, high school, and even college. My hope is to be able to make this type of impact on my future students as well. I would love to obtain a leadership position in a collegiate music or fine arts program in addition to performing. I hope that my knowledge and experiences can be a benefit to future young artists.

Were you familiar with the book The Snowy Day before you were cast in the opera?

Yes. I read it when I was younger, but I definitely have a different outlook on it as an adult. Now when I read it, it is as if I am reliving my childhood and seeing the world through the eyes of Peter. When I was younger, I remember learning how important this book was, as it is the first mainstream children’s book to feature an African American child. I am glad that a new generation will also get to experience not only the book but the opera.
You have helped bring two HGO world premières to the stage in the past two years: Marian’s Song in 2020 and now The Snowy Day. What excites you about getting to work on new operas? I truly enjoy the experience of bringing it all together. With new operas, there is no blueprint, no previous performance to watch, and nobody to compare yourself to; it is just you and the music. We can create this beautiful production from scratch and orchestrate our own blueprint. As an artist, I am able to have some creative freedom and the ability to bring Mama to life the way I see her in my eyes. That is the fun part; that is what excites me.

In addition to learning the role of Mama in the current production, you also developed a Storybook Opera for children based on the book, using elements of the score and staging. What were some of the challenges? We had so many ideas for making it interactive and fun. The most challenging part was finding a way to do all that we wanted to in the designated performance time. The opera has an hour to tell the story and incorporate music, staging, and all of the other elements. We are trying to incorporate most of that in about 20 minutes, and we found a way to do that without having to limit ourselves.

What was the process for creating the Storybook Opera? We went through each page of the book and found parts within the score that we thought would be a good fit to incorporate. The music for the opera is beautiful, and we wanted to ensure it was included. We then discussed ways for us to make this an interactive experience for the students. With her experience with Storybooks Operas and my knowledge of the music, [HGOco Interim Programs Coordinator] Chelsea Lerner and I were able to collaborate on ideas and find a balance of music and story.

What do you hope young audiences get out of the program? In Texas, we do not get to experience snow as often as other states. I hope the younger audiences enjoy the interactive experience we’ve created. Peter is experiencing snow for the first time, and I want the students to feel as if they are going on this journey of discovery along with him. I also hope that the younger generation wants to add the book to their own personal libraries. —As told to Kathleen Brown

Want to book Storybook Opera: The Snowy Day for your classroom or community group? Email storybook@hgo.org to book this brand-new performance, available through the rest of the season!

Coming Soon from HGOco

Seeking the Human Spirit, What If?—Dialogues of the Carmelites
January 12, 2022, 6 p.m.–7 p.m.
An online conversation with soprano Natalya Romaniw exploring Blanche’s choice to go to the guillotine and the concept of martyrdom.

Music and Healing, ep. 4
February 1, 1 p.m.
Join Patrick Summers for episode 4 of the series Music and Healing.

Music and Healing, ep. 5
March 1, 1 p.m.
Join Patrick Summers for episode 5 of the series Music and Healing.

For more details, visit facebook.com/HGOcoHouston or HGO.org/HGOco.

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

The NEXUS Initiative
HGOco programs, including Student Performances and HGO’s performances at Miller Outdoor Theatre, are supported through the NEXUS Initiative, which is made possible by:
Anchorage Foundation of Texas
The Brown Foundation, Inc.
The Wortham Foundation, Inc.
Shell
The Impresarios Circle is Houston Grand Opera’s premier donor recognition society. These vanguard supporters who provide annual support of at least $100,000 are instrumental to HGO’s success. For information, please contact Greg Robertson, chief advancement officer, at 713-546-0274 or grobertson@hgo.org.

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. They are charter members of the Impresarios Circle and generously underwrite a mainstage production each season.

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.

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 and COVID-19 recovery efforts.

SARAH AND ERNEST BUTLER
HGO subscribers for over 20 years, Ernest and Sarah are the lead underwriters for the company’s digital artistic programming for the 2020-21 season. They also have generously endowed three chairs at HGO: those of HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers, Chorus Master Richard Bado, and HGO Chorus Concertmaster Denise Tarrant. Because supporting young artists is a particular passion for both, HGO’s Concert of Arias is one of their favorite annual events. Ernest and Sarah reside in Austin and are longtime supporters of Ballet Austin, Austin Opera, Austin Symphony Orchestra, the Texas Cultural Trust, and the University of Texas Butler School of Music, which has carried their name since 2008. Ernest and Sarah are world travelers, and they never miss an opportunity to see opera in the cities they visit.

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.

LOUISE G. CHAPMAN
Louise Chapman of Corpus Christi, Texas, a longtime supporter of HGO, recently joined the HGO Board of Directors. 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 ROBERT AND JANE CIZIK FOUNDATION
The Cizik family name is synonymous with passion, devotion, and service to the people of Houston. The Ciziks have always been associated with hard work, high achievement, inspirational leadership, and love for their family. Survived by his wife, Jane, Robert Cizik spearheaded the fundraising and building of HGO’s home, the Wortham Theater Center. The Robert and Jane Cizik Foundation gives generously to many educational institutions and charitable organizations, including UTHealth, Harvard University, the University of Houston, and the University of Connecticut. In 2017, the School of Nursing at UTHealth was re-named the Jane and Robert Cizik School of Nursing at UTHealth in recognition of the family’s dedicated support.

THE ROBERT AND JANE CIZIK FOUNDATION
MATHILDA COCHRAN
Mathilda is a native of New Orleans and a long-time resident of Houston. She is a retired museum educator, having served for many years as Manager of the Docent and Tour Program at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, as well as a volunteer with Taping for the Blind, Inc. She and her late husband, Mike, created the Cochran Family Professorship in Earth and Environmental Sciences to support Tulane University’s School of Science and Engineering. Mathilda currently serves as a member of the HGO Board of Directors and is chair of the HGOoco Committee. She has been an HGO subscriber since the 1986-87 season.

CONOCOPHILLIPS
For over 40 years, ConocoPhillips has supported various programs at HGO, from special events to mainstage productions, including a long-standing tradition of supporting HGO’s season-opening operas. In 2009, the company gave a major multi-year grant to establish ConocoPhillips New Initiatives, a far-reaching program that allows HGOco to develop new and innovative education and community collaboration programs. Kelly Rose, general counsel and SVP, serves on the HGO Board of Directors.

JIM AND MOLLY CROWNOVER
Jim Crownover was the chairman of the HGO Board of Directors 2016–18. He has been a member of the board since 1987 and has served on the Executive, Governance, Development, and Finance Committees. He and his wife, Molly, have been HGO subscribers for 30 years and are members of HGO’s Laureate Society and Impresarios Circle. In 1998, Jim retired from a 30-year career with McKinsey & Company, Inc., and currently serves on the boards of Chemtura Corporation, Weingarten Realty, Republic Services, Inc., and FTI Consulting. Jim also serves and supports the Houston Ballet, Rice University, the Houston Zoo, United Way Houston, Project Grad Houston, and a number of other organizations.

THE CULLEN FOUNDATION
For 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, as well as special support for HGO’s COVID-19 recovery efforts.

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, as well as a generous gift to HGO’s COVID-19 recovery efforts.

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 as HGO Studio Committee Chair. Liz and Jack were generous underwriters of HGO’s historic, first-ever Ring cycle and lead supporters of HGO’s German repertoire, including Elektra. Additionally, Liz and Jack chaired the 2018 Opera Ball and will chair this season’s Concert of Arias on January 21, 2022.

WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST FOUNDATION
The William Randolph Hearst Foundation is a national philanthropic resource for organizations working in the fields of culture, education, health, and social services. The Foundation identifies and funds outstanding nonprofits to ensure that people of all backgrounds in the United States have the opportunity to build healthy, productive, and inspiring lives. A dedicated supporter of HGO, the Foundation is a leading advocate for HGOco. The continued support from the Foundation makes it possible for Houstonians of all ages to explore, engage, and learn through the inspiring art of opera.

H-E-B
For over 115 years, H-E-B has contributed to worthy causes throughout Texas and Mexico, a tradition proudly maintained today. And for over 20 years, H-E-B has been a lead supporter of HGOco’s arts education programs for Houston area students. H-E-B’s partnership helps over 70,000 young people experience the magic of opera each season. Always celebrating Houston’s cultural diversity, H-E-B helped make possible last season’s Marian’s Song and this season’s upcoming world premiere, The Snowy Day.
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 mainstage season and partners frequently on HGOco collaborations. HGO is fortunate to have Dr. Warren Ellsworth and Dr. Apurva Thekdi 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 in 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 productions, unforgettable productions, such as last May’s My Favorite Things: Songs from The Sound of Music.

DONNA KAPLAN AND RICHARD LYDECKER
Richard Lydecker has been an HGO subscriber and supporter for more than three decades. He is a member of the HGO Board of Directors and Impresarios Circle. Richard has great passion for opera, especially Wagner, and he and Donna were underwriters for HGO’s Ring cycle. They are also special events sponsors, supporting Opera Ball and Concert of Arias.

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 HGO Studio Committee, 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.

THE ROBERT AND JANICE MCNAIR FOUNDATION
Janice and the late Bob McNair, longtime HGO subscribers and supporters, are well known for their incredible philanthropy and for bringing the NFL back to Houston. Bob was a former chair of the HGO Board of Directors (1995-97). Through the family’s passionate support of students, young entrepreneurs, medical research and the community, The Robert and Janice McNair Foundation is transforming some of the biggest challenges our nation faces today into the solutions of tomorrow. As the lead supporter of HGO’s Holiday Opera Series, the McNair Foundation makes it possible for thousands of students and families to experience shorter length family-friendly operas during the holiday season each year.

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 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 Joel Thompson and Andrea Davis Pinkney’s *The Snowy Day*.

SID MOORHEAD
Sid Moorhead is the owner of Moorhead’s Blueberry Farm in Conroe, Texas, a family business that started as his father’s hobby over 40 years ago. After working for several years as a computer analyst, Sid left the corporate world to run the farm. He’s been an opera lover since he was in college, and he joined the Opera as an HGO Trustee in 2014. Now a member of the HGO Board of Directors who served as chair of Concert of Arias 2021, Sid enjoys traveling to experience opera around the world on our HGO Patron trips. We’re thrilled to have Sid as a valued member of our HGO family.

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 companies and the retired vice chairman and president of Kinder Morgan, Inc., and Kinder Morgan Energy Partners, LP. The Morgans support HGOco, 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 HGOco Committee.

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.

BEVERLY AND STAMAN OGILVIE
HGO subscribers since 1997, Beverly and Staman Ogilvie are true advocates for HGO and the performing arts. Staman is the former Chief Executive Officer of Hines, and is responsible for the development, acquisition, and management of more than 29 million square feet of commercial real estate as well as several thousand acres of planned community developments. Beverly previously served on the HGO Studio Committee. In addition to their commitment to the performing arts, Staman and Beverly established The Staman Ogilvie Fund for Spinal Cord Injury Recovery, Rehabilitation, and Research with Memorial Hermann Foundation. The fund has raised over $10 million toward innovative research to restore function for individuals suffering from spinal cord injuries. The Ogilvies also provided critical support in response to HGO’s COVID-19 recovery efforts.

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.

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 Christos Angelides, external relations general manager of integrated gas ventures, as a Trustee.
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.

TEXAS COMMISSION ON THE ARTS
The mission of the Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA) is to advance our state economically and culturally by investing in creative projects and programs. TCA supports a diverse and innovative arts community in the state, throughout the nation, and internationally by providing resources to enhance economic development, arts education, cultural tourism, and artist sustainability initiatives. Over the years, TCA has provided invaluable support to many HGO projects, including mainstage productions and HGOco education initiatives.

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 and past chair of the HGO Studio Committee. 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 LLP
HGO has been privileged to have the support of international law firm Vinson & Elkins LLP for nearly three decades. For more than 100 years, Vinson & Elkins LLP 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 Live from The Cullen recital featuring Reginald Smith Jr. The Opera is honored to have two Vinson & Elkins LLP 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 General Director Khori Dastoor, 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 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.
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**THE WORTHAM THEATER CENTER**

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Come back to the Cullen for HGO’s most beloved tradition celebrating the next generation of great opera singers in the springtime of their careers! Vote for your favorite artist during the live finals of the Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers, followed by a lively dinner with the finalists in the Wortham’s Grand Foyer.

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**2022 HOUSTON GRAND OPERA**

**CONCERT of ARIAS**

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**DRS. LIZ GRIMM AND JACK ROTH, CHAIRS**
Houston Grand Opera Trustees and Patrons Circle members support the Opera with annual donations of $10,000 or $5,000, respectively, and make possible the incredible work of HGO. Trustees and Patrons enjoy many benefits at the Opera, including complimentary valet parking, Masterson Green Room privileges during performance intermissions, behind-the-scenes experiences, personalized ticket service, two tickets to all open dress rehearsals, Opera Guild membership, a discount on Opera Guild Boutique purchases, and much more. For information on joining as a Trustee or Patron, please contact Kelly Nicholls at 713-980-8698 or knicholls@hgo.org.

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SAVE THE DATES

DECEMBER 3
(Release)
HGO Digital: Studio Showcase: This annual event highlights the diverse talents of our HGO Studio artists as they perform staged, costumed vignettes from a variety of operatic works. Streams through January 2. Free; HGODigital.org.

DECEMBER 9, 10, 11, 12M, 14, 15M*, 16, 17, 18, 19M
Performances of Joel Thompson and Andrea Davis Pinkney’s world premiere opera, The Snowy Day. Wortham Theater Center’s Cullen Theater. *student matinee

DECEMBER 10
(Release)
HGO Digital: Jake Heggie’s Three Decembers: This chamber opera from composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer made its world premiere in Houston in 2008. Experience the work again in this new digital production, created in conjunction with Opera San José and starring Susan Graham. Streams through January 9. Paid; HGODigital.org.

DECEMBER 11
HGOco presents Holiday in the Tré, a singalong in conjunction with Emancipation Park. 2-3 p.m. Digital event.

DECEMBER 11
HGOco presents Carols on the Green, a holiday singalong at Discovery Green. 7:30 p.m.

DECEMBER 15
Student Matinee: HGOco hosts groups of students in grades 4-8 and their chaperones at performances of Joel Thompson and Andrea Davis Pinkney’s The Snowy Day. 10 a.m. School groups only: reserve online at HGO.org/StudentPerformances.

FEBRUARY 4, 6M, 8, 10, 12, 13M
Performances of Mozart’s The Magic Flute. Wortham Theater Center’s Brown Theater. Special intermission receptions for members of Opening Nights for Young Professionals at the February 4 performance only, and for members of Overture at the February 12 performance only.

FEBRUARY 12
Digital Program: What If? – Dialogues of the Carmelites: Seeking the Human Spirit goes digital with an interactive online workshop that examines the context in which our operatic characters make decisions. Then we ask... What if? HGO.org/HGOco

FEBRUARY 1
Music and Healing: HGO’s Artistic and Music Director, Patrick Summers, meets online with medical and arts professionals to discuss music’s growing use in clinical practice. Facebook.com/HGOcoHouston

FEBRUARY 5, 6
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. 7:30 p.m. February 5; 5 p.m. February 6.

FEBRUARY 11
(Release)
HGO Digital: Live from The Cullen: Lauren Snouffer: The internationally renowned soprano, along with pianist Joseph Li, celebrates love and the natural world through works by Debussy, Berg, Schubert, and contemporary composer Will Liverman. Streams through March 13. Free; HGODigital.org.

JANUARY 3 AND 4
Opera Unwrapped: Dialogues of the Carmelites and The Magic Flute: Lecture series for supporters. January 3 at noon and 6 p.m.; January 4 at noon.

JANUARY 14, 16M, 19, 22
Performances of Poulenc’s Dialogues of the Carmelites. Wortham Theater Center’s Brown Theater. Special intermission reception for members of Opening Nights for Young Professionals at the January 14 performance only.

JANUARY 14
Concert of Arias: The 34th Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers Concert of Arias, a celebration of the future of opera. 7 p.m. live competition finals and concert. Dinner with the artists follows in the Grand Foyer. Drs. Liz Grimm and Jack Roth, chairs. For information, contact Brooke Rogers at 713-546-0271 or brogers@hgo.org. HGO.org/COA. Streams on HGO Digital through February 20. Free; HGODigital.org.

JANUARY 15
Concert of Arias: The 34th Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers Concert of Arias, a celebration of the future of opera. 7 p.m. live competition finals and concert. Dinner with the artists follows in the Grand Foyer. Drs. Liz Grimm and Jack Roth, chairs. For information, contact Brooke Rogers at 713-546-0271 or brogers@hgo.org. HGO.org/COA. Streams on HGO Digital through February 20. Free; HGODigital.org.
MARCH 1
**Music and Healing:** HGO’s Artistic and Music Director, Patrick Summers, meets online with medical and arts professionals to discuss music’s growing use in clinical practice. Facebook.com/HGOcoHouston

MARCH 8
Live premiere, presented by HGOco: Jake Heggie, Margaret Atwood, and Joshua Hopkins’s song cycle, *Songs for Murdered Sisters.* Panel follows performance. 7 p.m. Rothko Chapel.

MARCH 11
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 19 (LIVE EVENT & DIGITAL RELEASE)
**Giving Voice:** HGO’s third annual *Giving Voice* concert will celebrate diverse artists in opera. Soprano Nicole Heaston hosts. Live event, Wortham Theater Center’s Cullen Theater, 7 p.m. Streams on HGO Digital through April 18. Free; HGODigital.org.

MARCH 19, 20, 26, 27
HGOco presents *Songs on the Water* at Buffalo Bayou Park. 4-5 p.m. and 6-7 p.m. each day.

MARCH 24
Digital Program: What If? — *Turandot: Seeking the Human Spirit* goes digital with an interactive online workshop that examines the context in which our operatic characters make decisions. Then we ask... What if? HGO.org/HGOco

APRIL 3 AND 4
**Opera Unwrapped: Turandot and Romeo and Juliet:** Lecture series for supporters. April 3 at noon; April 4 at noon and 6 p.m.

APRIL 8 (RELEASE)
**HGO Digital: Live from The Cullen:** Michelle Bradley: The fast-rising soprano, with HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers at the piano, sings Mahler’s five-song Rückert-Lieder, Barber’s Hermit Songs, Op. 29, and a selection of spirituals. Streams through May 8. Free; HGODigital.

APRIL 9
**Opera Ball 2022: The Journey to Marrakesh:** Join us for a dreamy Moroccan adventure when Houston’s only annual white tie gala returns with cocktails, dinner, a luxury auction, and dancing the night away. 6:30 p.m. Wortham Theater Center. Jennifer and Benjamin Fink, chairs; Teresa and José Ivo, auction chairs. Event followed by the ENCORE After Party, Tami Hiraoka and Louis Borrego, chairs. For information, contact Brooke Rogers at 713-546-0271 or brogers@hgo.org. HGO.org/OperaBall

APRIL 10
**Student Matinee:** HGOco hosts groups of students in grades 4-8 and their chaperones at performances of Gounod’s *Romeo and Juliet.* Special intermission receptions for members of Opening Nights for Young Professionals at the April 29 performance only, and for members of Overture at the May 7 performance only.

APRIL 22, 24M, 30, MAY 3, 6, 8M
Performances of Puccini’s *Turandot.* Wortham Theater Center’s Brown Theater. Special intermission reception for members of Opening Nights for Young Professionals at the April 22 performance only.

APRIL 29, MAY 1M, 7, 11
**Performances of Gounod’s Romeo and Juliet.** Wortham Theater Center’s Brown Theater. Special intermission receptions for members of Opening Nights for Young Professionals at the April 29 performance only, and for members of Overture at the May 7 performance only.

MAY 5
**Student Matinee:** HGOco hosts groups of students in grades 4-8 and their chaperones at performances of Gounod’s *Romeo and Juliet.* 10 a.m. School groups only: reserve online at HGO.org/StudentPerformances.

MAY 13 (RELEASE)
**HGO Digital: Live from The Cullen: Federico de Michèlis:** The renowned Argentinian bass-baritone Federico de Michèlis shares tango and chamber songs from his home country alongside jazz standards. He also plays guitar, with Emiliano Messiez on piano. Streams through June 12. Free; HGODigital.org

JUNE 10 (RELEASE)
**HGO Digital: Suite Española II:** Building on the critical and audience response for spring 2021’s *Suite Española: Explorando Iberia,* created by and starring the incomparable Ana María Martínez, this follow-up program celebrates the musical traditions of Spanish-speaking cultures in Central and South America. Streams through July 10. Paid; HGODigital.org

For more performances and events, in person and virtual, visit HGO.org!
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HGO’s Customer Care Center is another great resource. For performance information, to purchase or exchange tickets, or to make a donation to HGO, contact the Customer Care Center at 713-228-6737. You can also email customercare@hgo.org. Throughout the season, the Center will be staffed Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. During performance runs, the Center is open until 6 p.m., and on performance days, it is open until curtain time. The Center will be open on Saturdays and Sundays only when there is a performance, from noon until curtain. Hours are subject to change.

You can purchase tickets and make exchanges in person at the HGO Box Office, located in the Wortham Theater Center at 550 Prairie. Hours are Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. If there is a performance on Saturday or Sunday, the Box Office will be open from noon until curtain. Hours are subject to change.

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The Wortham Theater Center’s alcoves were designed with your comfort in mind. Step inside one of these golden-hued spaces in the Grand Foyer, and you’ll find a calm place to reflect on the evening’s performance over dinner or drinks.

EXCHANGING YOUR TICKETS

Full-season and mini-package subscribers may exchange their tickets for a different performance of the same opera without fee, subject to availability. Exchanges can be made by phone until the performance begins. Non-subscription single tickets may be exchanged with a service fee of $10 per ticket. When exchanged for tickets of greater value, the customer will be responsible for the difference; no refunds will be made. No exchanges are permitted after the performance has begun.

LOST OR MISPLACED TICKETS

There is no charge for replacing lost tickets. Call the Customer Care Center at 713-228-6737 to request replacement tickets. They will be reprinted and held at the Will Call window for your performance.

PATRONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Wortham Theater Center features wheelchair access to both theaters with a choice of seating locations and ticket prices. An FM assistive listening device, generously provided by the Houston First Corporation, is available for use free of charge at all performances. Please call the Customer Care Center at 713-228-6737 for full details.

Descriptive services for persons with vision loss are available with 48-hour advance reservations. Please call 713-980-8662 for details.

PARKING

Valet parking is a benefit of membership for Patrons Circle donors; the valet station is located on Prairie Street. If you would like information about membership at this level, please contact a member of HGO’s Development staff at 713-546-0704, or e-mail us at donorservices@hgo.org.

If you have a state-issued disability permit and need valet parking, you may purchase special passes by contacting the Customer Care Center. Parking spots for disabled ticket holders are also available in the Theater District Garage on a first-come, first-served basis.

Parking in the Theater District Parking Garage is $12 on weekends and after 5 p.m. on weekdays. Clearance for trucks and vans is 6’8”.

HGO AND SAFETY

It is wonderful to be back with you at the Wortham Theater Center. As we get back to live opera on the mainstage, the safety of our audience, cast, creative team, union members, technicians, and staff remains our top priority.

As a reminder, for performances during HGO’s holiday repertoire, there are new protocols in place throughout the theater for the protection of all, created with guidance from the HGO Health Committee, local health officials, and the Centers for Disease Control:

• All guests attending HGO performances and events will be required to wear a mask covering the nose and mouth while inside the Wortham Theater Center, including while seated for a performance.

• The Green Room will remain closed throughout the fall.

• Enhanced cleaning procedures are in place throughout the building.

• The building has been equipped with additional hand sanitizing stations, upgraded air ventilation, and increased touchless amenities.

Thank you for adhering to HGO’s safety procedures!
MAKE PLANS NOW TO SEE HGO’S EXCITING WINTER REP!

POULENC  
Dialogues of the Carmelites  
January 14–22, 2022  
Sung in French with projected English translation

The Convent Is No Refuge from Fear

*Dialogues of the Carmelites*, Poulenc’s tragedy in two parts, takes place during the French Revolution and asks the question: what makes a martyr? Seeking to protect herself from the guillotine, young aristocrat Blanche de la Force leaves her family and trembles her way to the Carmelite convent. But as the bedridden prioress admonishes the fearful Blanche, it is nuns who protect the convent, not the other way around. Promising to embrace her new life, Blanche befriends Constance, another young nun, who’s had a nightmare that they’ll soon die together. What began as a fresh start quickly turns to tragedy as the First Prioress dies and the revolutionaries come for the nuns.

Blanche is portrayed by incredible soprano and HGO Studio alumna Natalya Romaniw, and powerhouse soprano Christine Goerke returns to HGO as Madame Lidoine. The treasured soprano Patricia Racette, having triumphed in the roles of Blanche and Lidoine earlier in her career, makes her much-anticipated role debut as Madame de Croissy in this lushly beautiful production, directed by the legendary Francesca Zambello and conducted by HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers.

MOZART  
The Magic Flute  
February 4–13, 2022  
Sung in German with projected English translation

The Immersive Magic of Mozart

Prepare to be astonished as the musical brilliance of Mozart meets the stunning visual spectacle of Barrie Kosky and Suzanne Andrade’s production of the composer’s masterpiece *The Magic Flute*. The cast interacts with silent film-style projections as they carry audiences into an enchanted world where good faces the forces of darkness.

The fable centers around noble Prince Tamino and bird catcher Papageno’s quest to rescue Pamina, the Queen of the Night’s daughter. During their journey, the two are tested as they overcome evil to discover the truth. Four incredible HGO Studio alumni lead the cast of this can’t-miss production: Norman Reinhardt as Tamino, Andrea Carroll as Pamina, Thomas Glass as Papageno, and Anthony Robin Schneider as Sarastro/Speaker. Rising soprano Rainelle Krause makes her HGO debut as the Queen of the Night. Dame Jane Glover conducts.
This six-year multidisciplinary initiative is designed to highlight the universal spiritual themes raised in opera and to expand and deepen Houstonians’ connections to opera and to art. The theme for 2021-22 is Character and includes Carmen, The Snowy Day, Dialogues of the Carmelites, and Turandot.

For information on providing leadership support for Seeking the Human Spirit, please contact Greg Robertson at 713-546-0274 or grobertson@hgo.org.

For more information, please contact Richard Buffett at 713-546-0216 or rbuffett@hgo.org.

HGO.org/LaureateSociety

Who will enjoy world-class opera because of your generosity?

By including HGO in your will or as a beneficiary of your retirement plan or insurance policy, you become a partner with HGO in perpetuating the art form we love, sustaining its vibrant good health for future generations. As a member of the Laureate Society, your legacy gift helps ensure opera forever in Houston.

For more information, please contact Richard Buffett at 713-546-0216 or rbuffett@hgo.org.

HGO.org/LaureateSociety

YOUR LEGACY COUNTS
Hermès, cavalier jewelry