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As HGO reaches a new milestone, we take a nostalgic look back—and cast an optimistic eye on the future.

Find out what the season has in store.

HGO Assistant Artistic Director Mena Mark Hanna speaks to librettist/director Simon Callow.

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On the cover, clockwise from upper left: Ramón Vargas; Joan Sutherland; Plácido Domingo; Samuel Ramey; Joyce DiDonato; Renée Fleming; Marcello Giordani.

Designed by Pattima Singhalaka.

This page: a scene from Florencia en el Amazonas, 1996. Photo by Ken Howard.
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A Message
from the Artistic & Music Director and the Managing Director

It is almost impossible to believe that a decade has passed since our Golden Jubilee and that we are now marking our sixtieth anniversary. With this special preview issue of Opera Cues, we invite you to join in on all we have to offer this season—and we give you some inside information that will help you get the most from your opera experience.

First, we hope you’ll save the date for our gala anniversary concert March 19, 2015, featuring star mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, an alumna of our distinguished young artist training program, the HGO Studio. We have so much to celebrate, and much more to look forward to, as you’ll see in “Voicing Hope: HGO at Sixty” in this issue.

This sixtieth anniversary season is striking for its abundance of strong characters and the opportunities they provide for singers to flex their acting muscles, some in works that haven’t been seen at HGO for many years. This season, we offer our first staging of Verdi’s Otello in more than two decades and our first Sweeney Todd since 1984, when HGO became the first opera company to stage it. The revelatory La Fura dels Baus production of Wagner’s Ring continues with Die Walküre—the only Ring opera we’ve presented before, staged only once, in 1960!

We are also thrilled to present a brand new work this season—the world premiere of Iain Bell and Simon Callow’s A Christmas Carol, the beginning of our new series of holiday-themed operas. The 2014–15 repertoire is rounded out by Puccini’s Madame Butterfly and Mozart’s Così fan tutte and The Magic Flute. Find out more about each of the operas and the superlative singing actors, conductors, directors, and designers who will bring them to life in our “Guide to the 2014–15 Season” beginning on p. 35.

By the time you read this, all the HGO Studio artists will be hard at work on Studio Showcase, their annual scenes program, to be held September 16 (for more info, see our calendar, p. 91). It’s a wonderful way to preview some of this season’s repertoire, including selections from Così fan tutte and Sweeney Todd, and sample unfamiliar operas. It’s free to season ticket holders, and we hope you won’t miss it.

We look forward to seeing you at the Wortham in October.

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Scenes from Die Walküre, above, and The Magic Flute, below.

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NEWS & NOTES

HGO ORCHESTRA PRINCIPAL PERFORMS IN PRESTIGIOUS CONCERT

Elizabeth Priestly Siffert, principal oboist of the HGO Orchestra since 2008, was a featured performer in the final concert for the International Double Reed Society’s annual conference this summer in New York.

Siffert’s performance was sponsored by the venerable oboe manufacturer F. Lorée Paris at the request of the company’s CEO, Alain de Gourdon. In the concert, she performed the Foss Oboe Concerto with the Orchestra of Saint Luke’s. “I’m especially glad they chose this piece for me,” says Siffert, “because the second movement is based on a Sicilian folk song and I am third-generation Sicilian-American. I feel a connection to this piece.”

Siffert is a native of Sugar Land and earned a bachelor’s degree at the Eastman School of Music. She has made solo performances with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra; the Houston Ballet Orchestra, where she is currently the principal oboist; Orquesta de Camara de Minería (Mexico City); and Orquestra Classica da Madeira (Funchal, Portugal), where she was principal oboist from 2003 to 2007.

SUMMER OPERA CAMPERS HONE MUSIC SKILLS

HGOco spent three weeks this summer hosting children ages eight to eighteen in three opera camps.

Opera Experience brought together students going into grades 4–9 to develop a better understanding of healthy singing and improve music reading and theory skills. Participants learned—and, at the end of the week, performed—pieces ranging from “A Spoonful of Sugar” from Mary Poppins to the operatic favorite Hansel and Gretel’s Prayer from Humperdinck’s Hansel and Gretel.

The following week in Create an Opera, students entering grades 3–6 wrote a libretto, composed all the music, and designed and built set, props and costumes for a performance at the end of the week. The children based their libretto on the book The Quiltmaker’s Gift by Jeff Brumbeau and Gail De Marcken.

The final camp of the summer, Art of Opera, was for teens in grades 7–12. In this camp, participants had two weeks to learn all the music, staging, and choreography for a student arrangement of Gilbert and Sullivan’s The Pirates of Penzance and perform it at the historic Heinen Theatre on the Houston Community College central campus.

Registration for next year’s Opera Camps opens on February 3, 2015. Please check our website at HGO.org/hgoco for announcements throughout the season.

TEENS EXPRESS THEMSELVES IN MUSIC, WORDS, AND ART

Imagine a group of teens sitting around a table intensely working out their definition of “home,” their views of their community, and their self-identification within their community. Now imagine that these same kids use their answers, metaphors, and ideas to create a short film or biopic to highlight their answers with music, words, and art. The result is magic, and HGOco was part of it, working in collaboration with Ripley House Neighborhood Center.

Six teens participated in a focused five-day program to create their film projects, which they produced and edited on phones and “bloggies”—cameras about the size of smart phones. They presented their films for the HGOco and Ripley House teams.
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THE VALKYRIE RIDES AGAIN!

Brünnhilde—HGO’s entry in the annual Art Car Parade—rode again in the 27th Annual Art Car Parade on May 10 and won first prize in the performance art car category. Perched in Brünnhilde’s open mouth, baritone Liam Bonner provided her voice, just as he did for her Art Car Parade debut in 2008 when she also won first prize.

Megan, HGO’s properties design director, designed the piece. She says she chose the image of Brünnhilde, the leader of the Valkyries in Wagner’s Ring cycle, because it is universally associated with opera. The face was carved by sculptor Alexey Markin, and a number of volunteers have kept Brünnhilde performance-ready over the years.
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Meet the Studio

BY LAURA CHANDLER
OPERA CUES EDITOR

Meet the six young artists who are new to the HGO Studio—our premier training program—for the 2014–15 season. They join returning singers Peixin Chen, Thomas Richards, and Reginald Smith Jr.; conductor/pianist Emily Senturia; and pianist/coach Christopher Turbessi.

PUREUM JO, SOPRANO
Mr. Joseph Matulevich and Ms. Sasha Davis/Nancy and Ted Haywood Fellow

“Now I’m really thankful that my mom made me sing,” soprano Pureum Jo says with a laugh.

At age seven, she says, she wanted to be a ballerina, but her mother was worried she wouldn’t be able to eat what she wanted! In order to help her daughter find her talent, Pureum’s mother had her try a little of everything, including sports, art, and public speaking. When Pureum (pronounced POOR-um) tried singing, she began winning competitions, and they both had a feeling they had found her niche. She was able to get into an excellent middle school and a high school that specialized in the arts in her native Korea.

But she wanted to come to the United States: “Opera is more important here than in Korea,” she explains. She studied music at The Juilliard School, earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees. There, she heard about Houston Grand Opera and the HGO Studio from classmates. “I thought that HGO was ideal for singers because they get real opportunities to sing roles, and they are treated like real opera singers, professional people.”

She looks forward to singing Papagena in The Magic Flute next season and also to working with Dr. Stephen King, director of vocal instruction for the HGO Studio: “I haven’t worked with him yet, but everyone worships him!”

D’ANA LOMBARD, SOPRANO
Lynne Murray Sr. Educational Foundation Fellow

“I was ridiculously excited,” says D’Ana Lombard of the moment she received a call from HGO Studio Director Laura Canning inviting her to become a member of the 2014–15 Studio after her first-prize win in the Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. It’s easy to see why: she had begun the year knowing that she would apply to many young artist programs, but with the specific goal of joining HGO’s.

D’Ana, who pronounces her name dee-AHna, performed in musical theater in school but came to the realization that her voice was better suited to the classical style of singing than the Broadway “belting” style. She finally made the decision to pursue opera as a career with her parents’ support, determined to see how far her talent would take her.

That combination of determination and talent has resulted in a number of prestigious competition wins and a two-year stint as a member of the Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist Program at L.A. Opera, where she most recently covered the title role in Thaïs and sang Alisa in Lucia di Lammermoor.

At HGO this season, she looks forward to singing First Lady in The Magic Flute and Kate Pinkerton in Madame Butterfly.

SAHAR NOURI, PIANIST/COACH
John M. O’Quinn Foundation and Audrey Jones Beck Endowed Fellow

“It was the best thing that ever happened to me,” says Iranian pianist/coach Sahar Nouri of the Orff Approach class her classical-music-loving parents enrolled her in when she was a child. Developed by composer Carl Orff, the approach presumes all children can learn music and it involves dancing, playing, and singing. Toward the end of the eighteen-month program, the children were encouraged to select an instrument they wanted to study. She began to study violin, and later, piano.

While she was at university in Iran, her brother came to the United States to study civil engineering at the University of Michigan. He took note of its exceptional music programs and urged her to come. “The violin department didn’t take me,” she says, “but the piano department did.” And so she came, and found herself in one of the best piano programs in the world.

“People ask how I can practice seven hours a day,” she says, “but it feels so good to get better. It’s so thrilling—that’s what keeps me going.”

She says she came to HGO because “the learning never ends, and I want to learn from the best.” She will have plenty of opportunities: she will coach Così fan tutte, Madame Butterfly, and Sweeney Todd and perform with Studio singers in recital and in the Studio Showcase.

Meet the six young artists who are new to the HGO Studio—our premier training program—for the 2014–15 season. They join returning singers Peixin Chen, Thomas Richards, and Reginald Smith Jr.; conductor/pianist Emily Senturia; and pianist/coach Christopher Turbessi.
A Midsummer Night’s Dream
Choreography by John Neumeier
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With its joyous young lovers, meddlesome fairies, and bumbling troupe of amateur actors, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is a cacophony of magic and merriment. This colorful production will delight children and adults alike.

From Houston to the World
■ September 18 – 28

ONE/end/ONE
Choreography: Jorma Elo

Murmuration
Choreography: Edwaard Liang

Paquita
Choreography: Stanton Welch, after Marius Petipa

Houston Ballet’s fall mixed repertory program showcases three works made specifically for Houston Ballet’s dancers: Jorma Elo’s witty *ONE/end/ONE*, Edwaard Liang’s spiritual *Murmuration*, and Stanton Welch’s vivid interpretation of the third act of Spanish flavored *Paquita*.

Purchase online at houstonballet.org or call 713.227.2787

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is made possible through the generosity of Phoebe and Bobby Tudor.
MORGAN PEARSE, BARITONE  
*Dr. Ellen R. Gritz and Milton D. Rosenau Jr. Fellow*

“I decided to give singing a go, and it worked. I kept on giving it a go, and it kept working. HGO is the next step in giving it a go,” says Morgan Pearse with a laugh.  

The Danish-Australian baritone began singing at an “incredible boys’ high school in Sydney, which had ninety people on the music staff. It was the cool thing to be in choir—a third of the students in the school were in it.” After high school, he trained at the Sydney Conservatorium and at the Royal College of Music in London and its prestigious Benjamin Britten International Opera School.  

He came to the attention of HGO Studio Director Laura Canning through Nicholas Sears of the Royal College of Music. She invited Morgan to participate in the 2014 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias, in which he was a finalist.  

“I’m still trying to go through developmental stages as a singer. I wanted to work in a nurturing environment with a company that is interested in my having a career beyond the Studio,” Morgan explains. Impressed by what he saw in Houston and what his research uncovered, he was ready to say yes when he was invited to be a member. He will take on the roles of Prince Yamadori in *Madame Butterfly*, Papageno in student performances of *The Magic Flute*, and Anthony Hope in *Sweeney Todd*. “I couldn’t have had a more exciting offer,” he says.

MEGAN SAMARIN, MEZZO-SOPRANO  
*Megan Beale and Dick Anderson Fellow*

A lot can happen in twelve months. One year ago this summer, Megan Samarin was a member of HGO’s Young Artists Vocal Academy (YAVA), a one-week intensive for exceptionally gifted undergraduate vocal music students. This summer she was excitedly looking forward to becoming a member of the 2014–15 HGO Studio. At age twenty-one, she may be the youngest singer ever to be invited into the Studio.  

Her journey as a musician began at about age eight when she was made to take piano lessons. But she happened to “randomly” join an all-girls choir in seventh grade and found she really enjoyed singing. Sometime during her sophomore year she surprised her mom by asking to take classical voice lessons. After that, singing “became my life,” she says.  

The California native is a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, where she enjoyed numerous performance opportunities. HGO’s reputation in this regard was a big draw for Megan—“It’s amazing that HGO lets the Studio artists be on stage so much.” She also noted that HGO Studio singers she had heard were “the healthiest” in terms of singing technique.  

At HGO this season, she will perform Second Lady in *The Magic Flute* and Johanna in *Sweeney Todd*. “I’m so excited!” she enthuses. “I can’t wait.”

SOFIA SELOWSKY, MEZZO-SOPRANO  
*Mr. and Mrs. James W. Crownover Fellow*

Mezzo-soprano Sofia Selowsky became interested in opera through her father, a lover of Mozart. Starting when she was three or four years old, she says, “he would bring home operas on VHS, most of the Mozart operas. I would sit in front of the TV for hours and I started singing along.” As she got older, she sang in choirs and in school musicals, but opera stayed with her. “The older I got, the more I realized I might have the potential to sing opera,” she adds.  

She participated in the 2014 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias, but Houston audiences almost didn’t get to hear her that night—she developed a case of food poisoning the night before the concert. A doctor prescribed some anti-nausea medication, and between that and the surge of adrenaline a singer gets before and during a performance, she not only “got through it” but she also took home third prize.  

She believes the HGO Studio is a good fit for her: “I had heard it’s a company that takes really good care of singers and isn’t afraid to take on young singers,” meaning singers about her own age (twenty-three) as opposed to those in their late twenties. After all, she has completed a master’s degree (University of Cincinnati College–Conservatory of Music) and needs a “bridge” between her academic work and her professional career. The HGO Studio was designed to be just such a bridge.  

This season at HGO she will sing Suzuki in *Madame Butterfly*.
Houston Grand Opera
Studio Showcase 2014–15

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Picture Houston in 1955. There was no 610 Loop and no Interstate 45 (the Interstate Highway System was funded a year later), and Memorial Drive extended only from Shepherd to Post Oak. The Shamrock Hotel near the new Medical Center was the social center of town, and destination shopping meant the downtown Sakowitz Department Store, lit with nearly 11,000 fluorescent lights. The only professional sport in Houston in 1955 was baseball—played by the minor league Houston Buffaloes in Buffalo Stadium, which would later be renamed Busch Stadium.

Most but certainly not all American homes had a single television on which seventy-five programs were available on three channels, and sometimes a fourth in large cities. The TV hits were *I Love Lucy, The Ed Sullivan Show, The $64,000 Question,* and a program hosted by a newcomer, *The Johnny Carson Show.* The television event of the year, though, was a live broadcast of the Broadway musical *Peter Pan* starring Mary Martin of Weatherford, Texas. In order to perform in *Peter Pan,* Martin had left during the fifth season of Broadway’s *South Pacific,* which had been written for her and opera star Ezio Pinza. The new hit plays that year were *Inherit the Wind* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* the latter of which won the Pulitzer Prize for drama. In Hollywood,

The repertoire of Houston Grand Opera over its fourscore years has been enormously varied, with the highest concentration of American repertoire of any major U.S. opera company.
Marty won the twenty-eighth Academy Award for best picture, though Lady and the Tramp was easily the most popular movie of the year, with a gross four times that of its nearest competitor. Its producer opened Disneyland, a new “theme park”—a term never heard before—in Anaheim, California. The most widely felt national legislation was controversial: President Eisenhower raised the hourly minimum wage from 75 cents to a dollar.

That’s what was going on in Houston and the nation in the year Houston Grand Opera was established by Walter Herbert (1898–1975), who served as artistic director until 1972. The company’s first season was modest, opening with two operas written within Herbert’s lifetime: Richard Strauss’s 1905 Salome and Puccini’s Madama Butterfly from 1906, each given two performances. Herbert eventually grew the company’s repertoire to include such works as Massenet’s Don Quixote, Wagner’s Die Walküre (HGO’s only performances of a Ring opera prior to the current cycle), and Moore’s The Ballad of Baby Doe, and he engaged promising newcomers like Beverly Sills and Plácido Domingo. According to Carl Cunningham, music critic of the former Houston Post, Herbert was “taciturn and self-effacing by nature” and left Houston a “stable, secure, and functioning company that was able to stand solidly on its feet and proceed to new adventures.” Having spent nearly two decades nurturing the company, Herbert identified his own successor, and, along with some hefty encouragement from Ben Love, the board president at the time, he took a chance on an untried but energetic young man, a former singer who had decided to try his hand at management—David Gockley.

And for the following thirty-four years, the new adventures came in quick succession, thanks to Gockley’s
visionary tenure. David, then not yet thirty years old, instinctively understood the boomtown feel of Houston, and he quickly built the company’s reputation and international standing, largely through the commissioning of American operas with American stories written by American composers, something no American opera company had done before. David mobilized community support for building the Wortham Theater Center, which broke ground during one of the city’s worst financial downturns. He deftly analyzed the older U.S. cities—New York, Chicago, and San Francisco—knowing their opera companies were largely Eurocentric. Chicago, the only major company of that era run by an American, was nevertheless known as “La Scala West.” They were great companies, to be sure, but David knew Houston needed something different. At the helm of Houston Grand Opera, David did what few can claim: he changed how people thought about opera.

When David departed in 2005 to take his current post as general director of San Francisco Opera, he was succeeded by Anthony Freud, an erudite and sophisticated opera lover and astute businessman with a wide range of esoteric tastes. He is quiet, considered, thoughtful, articulate, and passionate, and he re-energized the company with a daring series of Benjamin Britten operas, a shocking decision at the time. Anthony left HGO at the end of the 2010–11 season to take the general directorship of Lyric Opera of Chicago.

The repertoire of Houston Grand Opera over its fourscore years has been enormously varied, with the highest concentration of American repertoire of any major U.S. opera company. We have to date performed fifty-four world premieres of varying scales, including Thomas Pasatieri’s The Seagull in 1974 (the first new opera the company presented) and four operas by Carlisle Floyd: Billy’s Doll, Willie Stark, The Passion of Jonathan Wade, and Cold Sassy Tree, plus another new work from the eighty-eight-year-old dean of American opera to come during the 2015–16 season. Houston Grand Opera also premiered Leonard Bernstein’s A Quiet Place (Bernstein drunkenly thanked David Gockley at the opera’s cast party for “bringing culture to this cow town,” a slur still recalled by many in attendance); John Adams’s Nixon in China, which will soon appear again at HGO to celebrate its thirtieth anniversary; Stewart Wallace’s Harvey Milk; the late Daniel Catán’s Florencia en el Amazonas; and André Previn’s Brief Encounter. Our initiative HGOco, established in 2007 under Anthony Freud, has already commissioned and premiered sixteen works. To put our commissioning record in some perspective, New York’s Metropolitan Opera has performed twenty-seven world premieres in its 134-year history. HGO has been a haven to composers and aspires to continue this important tradition with a series of commissions designed to address a huge gap in the operatic repertoire: operas with December holiday themes that can be enjoyed by young adults with their parents.

Houston audiences have also seen the American premieres of Handel’s Rinaldo, Rossini’s La donna del lago, and...
Weinberg’s *The Passenger* along with a huge array of the standard repertoire, but it is the energy of creating new work that informs everything about our company. Though many new operas do not immediately find an audience, public taste can be a fickle thing: many operas that were not initially well-received are now viewed with great affection by the public. Great creators often are slightly ahead of the rest of us, so that some of their creations need time, often a generation or more, to find an audience. HGO’s role has been to light artistic fires, the warmth of which we may never feel.

Anniversaries are wonderful opportunities to reflect on achievements, but they are also the perfect lens through which to look forward. It is deeply important for us to have a fiscally responsible organization, without which nothing else would be possible, but civilizations aren’t ultimately...
judged by their balance sheets; they are remembered for their creations, and for the joy, inspiration, and/or reflection they engendered. Excellence in the arts symbolizes a community rich in ideas and energetic about its future.

But why support an art form in which a sold-out performance pays for only about a quarter of its cost? Any organization in the twenty-first century that costs a great deal of money to run but doesn’t make money is at odds with the times; we live in an increasingly bottom-line world, and the difference between cost and value are constantly confused and conflated. But of course they are not the same: does anyone recall whether Handel’s Covent Garden seasons were balanced, or whether the first decades of Wagner’s Bayreuth Festival made money?

Houston Grand Opera exists for two reasons. The first is that a group of citizens, our board and supporters, believe in opera enough to support the company of artists and artisans the art form demands, hopeful that it will reflect back on the city. Secondly, and most importantly, we exist for a single word with multiple meanings: voice.

The great life-force of the human singing voice guides everything we do. Singing gives voice to the expansive imaginations of composers, who are themselves voicing deep emotions about the world. Our orchestra aspires to a tonal radiance that mirrors the great singers on our stage. Opera gives voice to a vast array of human emotion. The idea is simple yet miraculous: voices emanate from within a person who possesses a rare gift; that sound, which is simply vibrating air, envelops and enters us. When we receive that gift, we can often find our own voices.

Opera, like so much historical creation, was the child of an empire, born in Venice near the end of the 1,000-year
Venetian Republic. A decade after the empire’s 1797 fall, William Wordsworth memorably reflected on its extinction: “Men are we,” he wrote, “and must grieve when even the shade of that which once was great is passed away.” History moved on, it is true, but the creations born in Venice spread across the world and live still, with many nations developing their own traditions and voices. Our great task and privilege as the temporary custodians of Houston Grand Opera is to ensure its existence beyond anyone now living, to give opera the forum to tell us what it wants its voice to become in the future.

Sixty years hence, in 2075, what will be said of us? Which creations of ours will be valued and remembered? What will our successors try to retain from our era? Might 2015 feel as inspiring to them as 1955 does to us now? This should be our hope.

Author Patrick Summers has been leading HGO as artistic and music director since May 2011, jointly with Perryn Leech, managing director.
OPENING NIGHT DINNER CELEBRATION

ALEX AND ASTLEY BLAIR, CHAIRS
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2014

CELEBRATE AS HOUSTON GRAND OPERA OPENS ITS 60TH SEASON WITH VERDI’S OTELLO FOLLOWED BY A BLACK TIE OPENING NIGHT DINNER CELEBRATION

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Just the Facts

Go behind the scenes of our 2014–15 repertoire with HGO Assistant Artistic Director Mena Mark Hanna.

Photo by Robert Workman
VERDI

OTEILLO

Brown Theater
Sung in Italian with projected English translation

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

Otello     Simon O’Neill
           Lynn Wyatt Great Artist 2014–15

Desdemona Aiyn Pérez *

Iago       Marco Vratogna *

Cassio     Norman Reinhardt ‡

Emilia     Victoria Livengood

Lodovico   Morris Robinson

Conductor  Patrick Summers
           Margaret Alkek Williams Chair

Director   John Cox

Set and Costume Designer Johan Engels

Lighting Designer Michael James Clark

Chorus Master Richard Bado ‡

Children’s Chorus Director Karen Reeves

A production of Teatro Regio di Parma, Opéra de Monte-Carlo, and Los Angeles Opera

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Grand Underwriters: ConocoPhillips; Lynn Wyatt

* Houston Grand Opera debut
‡ Former Houston Grand Opera Studio artist
One could say—arguably—that the greatest influence on Verdi’s dramas were not the operas of Rossini, Bellini, or Mozart, but the plays of Shakespeare. Though he could not read English and lived two centuries after Shakespeare’s death, Giuseppe Verdi was obsessed with the Bard. He read Shakespeare daily in Italian translation, sometimes with the help of his wife, and constantly compared the best and most recent translations available. In addition to his successful operatic adaptations of Macbeth (1847), Othello (1887), and The Merry Wives of Windsor (Falstaff) (1893), he considered adaptations of King Lear, The Tempest, Hamlet, and Romeo and Juliet. The great Italian composer took the task of adapting Shakespeare’s works with tremendous care and respect. When he reviewed the score of Ambroise Thomas’s Hamlet, Verdi supposedly exclaimed, “Poor Shakespeare! How they have mistreated him!”

**BACKGROUND**

After Aida in 1871, Verdi found himself increasingly isolated from current trends in music composition. The composer who had been at the forefront of Italian music for two decades was accused of being reactionary and out-of-touch with the times, and Verdi became reluctant to write new works after the Messa da Requiem of 1874, written in memory of Italian poet and novelist Alessandro Manzoni.

Two men are responsible for luring Verdi out of possible retirement: Giulio Ricordi, the young director of the Ricordi publishing house, and Arrigo Boito, an avant-garde librettist and composer whose opera Mefistofele created a furore upon its premiere in 1868. In 1879, Ricordi and Boito approached Verdi with the possibility of composing a version of Shakespeare’s Othello, and a characteristically cautious Verdi eventually agreed to collaborate with Boito on what became Otello. Before Otello was completed, however, Verdi revised Simon Boccanegra (rev. 1881 with Boito’s assistance) and the troubled Don Carlos (rev. 1884). Both of these revisions can be seen, in hindsight, as trial runs for the late Italian opera style Verdi would utilize in Otello—an opera that does away with old Italian recitative/aria structure, places huge vocal and dramatic demands on the roles of Otello and Iago, and is composed with the most demanding orchestral writing Verdi had yet attempted.

With the premiere of Otello in 1887, forty years after Verdi’s first operatic adaptation of Shakespeare, the composer ended a sixteen-year drought of new operatic works.

**SYNOPSIS**

Nearly all the story elements in Shakespeare’s play are present in Verdi’s opera. The Moor Otello, a Venetian general who has just vanquished the invading Turks, has been recently married to the beautiful Desdemona. Otello’s ensign, Iago, is enraged at Otello for passing him over for promotion in favor of Cassio. To get revenge, Iago plots to drive a wedge between Otello and Desdemona. Iago’s manipulations make it appear to Otello that Desdemona has been unfaithful to him, driving him into a jealous rage that ends in tragedy.

**ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

A dramatic masterpiece, Verdi’s Otello is remarkable both for its concise adaptation of Shakespeare’s drama and for the muscular melodic inventiveness that characterizes Verdi’s later works. English director John Cox and South African designer Johan Engels bring the Moor of Venice to life in a timeless and highly stylized production first seen at the Teatro Regio in Parma.

The standout cast, led by HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers, includes international sensation tenor Simon O’Neill (Otello), who made a memorable HGO debut in the title role of Lohengrin and was last at HGO as Florestan in Beethoven’s Fidelio alongside Karita Mattila as Leonore. He returns this spring to sing Siegmund in Die Walküre, again paired with Mattila as Sieglinde. Making their HGO debuts are 2012 Richard Tucker Award winner soprano Ailyn Pérez (Desdemona) and Italian baritone Marco Vratogna (Iago), who has won widespread recognition in the Verdi repertoire.
MOZART
COSÌ FAN TUTTE
Brown Theater
Sung in Italian with projected English translation

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM
Ferrando  Stephen Costello
Guglielmo  Jacques Imbrailo
Fiordiligi  Rachel Willis-Sørensen ‡
Dorabella  Melody Moore
Don Alfonso  Alessandro Corbelli
Despina  Nuccia Focile
Conductor  Patrick Summers
Production  Göran Järvefelt
Director  Harry Silverstein
Set and Costume Designer  Carl-Friedrich Oberle
Lighting Designer  Duane Schuler
Chorus Master  Richard Bado ‡

A production of Houston Grand Opera

Premier Guarantor: The General and Mrs. Maurice Hirsch Opera Fund

‡ Former Houston Grand Opera Studio artist
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s Così fan tutte, the composer’s third and final collaboration with librettist Lorenzo da Ponte, is an opera steeped in mythic origins. Once thought to be personally commissioned by Emperor Joseph II and based on a real-life Viennese scandal—two wealthy young officers in the Austro-Hungarian army make a bet with an old bachelor friend to test the constancy of their fiancées, who happened to be sisters—recent findings show that the libretto is original. The main elements of Così fan tutte’s plot, the trial of female constancy and wager, have their origin in mythology (the story of Procris), Boccaccio, Shakespeare (Cymbeline), and Cervantes.

BACKGROUND
Antonio Salieri, the Austrian Imperial Kappellmeister memorialized as Mozart’s rival in Peter Shaffer’s play Amadeus, tried his hand at Lorenzo da Ponte’s libretto but left it unfinished. Mozart, who, at the peak of his creative powers was well skilled at one-upmanship, took the libretto and turned it into a two-act masterpiece. Da Ponte retained much control over the composition and performance of Così fan tutte, so much so that his mistress Adriana Ferrarese del Bene, was cast as Fiordiligi. According to music critic William Mann, Mozart, who greatly disliked the prima donna and knew of her tendency to throw back her head in her upper register and lower her chin in her lower register, purposefully wrote Fiordiligi’s aria “Come scoglio” with constant leaps from top notes to low notes, in order to make her “bob like a chicken” onstage.

Audiences were not kind to Così fan tutte upon its premiere in 1790. Critical opinion at the time held that the opera was one of Mozart’s weaker works. Audiences found the opera to be too risqué, resulting in infrequent performances, and, when the opera was performed, offensive elements were often excised, to the detriment of the work. An 1821 production in Covent Garden presented the opera as Tit for Tat, or, the Tables Turned, altered and adapted from Così fan tutte.

Così fan tutte premiered in the United States in 1922 and was the second opera performed at the Glyndebourne Festival. After World War II, the opera was established as a staple in the standard operatic repertory.

SYNOPSIS
Two young soldiers, Ferrando and Guglielmo, brag about their fiancées’ virtue and faithfulness to their cynical friend Don Alfonso. Alfonso bets that their brides-to-be would stray if put to the test, and the men accept his wager. Alfonso tells the fiancées—the sisters Fiordiligi and Dorabella—that their intended husbands are to join their regiment immediately, and they bid a tearful farewell. Then, enlisting the help of the ladies’ maid, Despina, Alfonso introduces Fiordiligi and Dorabella to two “Albanians”—Ferrando and Guglielmo in disguise. Under cover of anonymity, each man begins to pursue the other’s fiancée, and within one day they have won their hearts. The truth comes out at a phony double wedding for the re-matched couples arranged by Don Alfonso, and all are forced to reflect and forgive.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS
Mozart’s late comedy Così fan tutte is a sensational portrayal of gender roles written at the height of the composer’s creative powers. Though nineteenth-century audiences found the plot of two young men testing their fiancées’ constancy too risqué, the opera is now regarded as one of the great Da Ponte/Mozart collaborations, along with The Marriage of Figaro and Don Giovanni. Veteran American director Harry Silverstein revives this classic Göran Järvefelt production.

HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers conducts a superb cast of internationals. After an impressive HGO debut last season as the Duke in Rigoletto, American tenor Stephen Costello sings Ferrando; our Guglielmo, South African baritone Jacques Imbrailo, will be remembered as Tarquinius in our 2012 staging of The Rape of Lucretia.

Recent HGO Studio alumna and winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions soprano Rachel Willis-Sørensen returns to HGO as Fiordiligi, while Melody Moore, last at HGO in The Passenger, returns to the company as Dorabella. Alessandro Corbelli, a specialist in Mozart comic roles, returns as Don Alfonso and Nuccia Focile as his partner in crime, the maid Despina.
IAIN BELL/SIMON CALLOW
A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Cullen Theater
Sung in English with projected English text

December 5 8 p.m. | December 6 8 p.m.
December 7 2:30 p.m. | December 7 8 p.m.
December 9 8 p.m. | December 9 8 p.m.
December 11 8 p.m. | December 12 8 p.m.
December 14 2:30 p.m. | December 21 2:30 p.m.

WORLD PREMIERE
A Chamber Opera
Based on A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

The Narrator Anthony Dean Griffey
Kevin Ray ‡ (Dec. 17 & 20)
Underwritten by Melinda and Bill Brunger

Conductor Warren Jones *
Director Simon Callow *
Set and Costume Designer Laura Hopkins *
Lighting Designer Mark McCullough

A commission and production of Houston Grand Opera

Premier Guarantor: Houston Grand Opera Endowment, Inc.
Grand Guarantor: The Robert and Janice McNair Foundation
Guarantor: Mr. and Mrs. Anthony G. Petrello
Grand Underwriters: The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; PwC

‡ Former Houston Grand Opera Studio artist

* Houston Grand Opera debut

Artwork by Pattima Singhalaka
A Christmas Carol, composed by British wunderkind Iain Bell with a libretto by Simon Callow, marks the beginning of a cycle of holiday-themed HGO commissions. This is not your Hallmark Channel Christmas Carol, however. Simon Callow, winner of an Olivier Award for Best Direction and author of Charles Dickens and the Great Theatre of the World, based the libretto on a little-known one-man stage adaptation approved by Charles Dickens shortly after A Christmas Carol was published in 1843. This version of the story revels in the supernatural; Iain Bell’s music is eerie and evokes the selfish Ebenezer Scrooge’s haunting encounters with the three ghosts.

Iain Bell, whose first opera, A Harlot’s Progress, was commissioned by the Theater an der Wien in Vienna, has written a demanding and thrilling score for Anthony Dean Griffey, the Grammy Award–winning tenor last seen at HGO as Alfredo in Die Fledermaus. The tenor will be the only singer on stage performing the role of the Narrator, and must embody all of A Christmas Carol’s characters.

**SYNOPSIS**

The opera follows the basic plot of Dickens’s story, made familiar by various films.

When the opera opens, it is the near the end of the workday on Christmas Eve. Scrooge, a penurious businessman, grudgingly gives his clerk Bob Cratchit the next day off for the holiday.

When Scrooge returns home, he is visited by the ghost of his former partner, Jacob Marley, who died on Christmas Eve seven years previously. Marley wears a long, heavy chain and warns Scrooge that he faces the same fate unless he mends his selfish ways. Marley warns that Scrooge will be visited by three spirits.

Scrooge is visited in turn by the ghosts of Christmas Past, Christmas Present, and Christmas Yet to Come. At the end of the final visit, Scrooge implores the spirit to reverse his fate, promising to be a new man.

**ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

Composer Iain Bell premiered his first opera, A Harlot’s Progress, in October 2013 with a cast headed by stars Diana Damrau and Nathan Gunn. He has written extensively for the voice, including the song cycles The Undying Splendour and Day Turned into Night. Warren Jones will make his HGO conducting debut, although he has served as a guest coach for the HGO Studio.

Anthony Dean Griffey has performed regularly at Houston Grand Opera since his debut in 2001 as Lennie in Carlisle Floyd’s Of Mice and Men, one of his signature roles. He is also widely acclaimed for his Peter Grimes, which he performed at HGO in 2010. He created the role of Mitch for the world premiere of André Previn’s A Streetcar Named Desire for San Francisco Opera.

HGO Studio alumnus Kevin Ray (2012–14) will perform the Narrator in two performances, December 17 and 20. As an HGO Studio artist, he sang such divergent repertoire as Eisenstein in performances of Die Fledermaus and Melot in Tristan and Isolde.

Librettist/director Simon Callow discusses A Christmas Carol and more with HGO’s Mena Mark Hanna on pp. 48–49.
PUCCINI
MADAME BUTTERFLY
Brown Theater
Sung in Italian with projected English translation

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

Cio-Cio-San  Ana María Martínez ‡
Pinkerton  Alexey Dolgov
Sharpless  Scott Hendricks ‡
Suzuki  Sofia Selowsky †
Goro  John Easterlin *

Conductor  Giancarlo Guerrero *
Production  Michael Grandage
Revival Director  Louisa Muller
Set and Costume Designer  Christopher Oram
Original Lighting Designer  Neil Austin
Chorus Master  Richard Bado ‡

A co-production of Houston Grand Opera, Grand Théâtre de Genève, and Lyric Opera of Chicago

JANUARY 23  7:30 p.m.
JANUARY 25  2 p.m.
JANUARY 28  7:30 p.m.
JANUARY 31  7:30 p.m.
FEBRUARY 6  7:30 p.m.
FEBRUARY 8  2 p.m.

Grand Underwriter: Bobbie-Vee and Jerry Cooney

* Houston Grand Opera debut
† Houston Grand Opera Studio artist
‡ Former Houston Grand Opera Studio artist
An internationally beloved opera in modern times—Giacomo Puccini’s Madama Butterfly is the sixth most frequently produced opera worldwide since 2008—the reception of the opera’s premiere in February 1904 was viciously hostile, and likely engineered by the chief rival of Puccini’s publisher. Puccini was accused of plagiarizing his own work (the critics found too much of a resemblance between the theme of Butterfly’s entrance and Mimì’s first act aria in La bohème) and that of other composers. Puccini described the premiere as a “veritable lynching.”

**BACKGROUND**

With a libretto produced by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, the same team that created libretti for La bohème and Tosca, Madama Butterfly was based on the one-act play by American playwright and impresario David Belasco Madame Butterfly: a Tragedy of Japan. The play was an adaptation of John Luther Long’s 1898 short story Madame Butterfly, based on recollections of Long’s sister, Jeanie Correll, who had been living in Japan with her Methodist missionary husband. Long’s story is also indebted to Pierre Loti’s 1887 novel, Madame Chrysanthème, which tells of a Naval officer briefly married to a young Japanese geisha while stationed in Nagasaki.

Puccini saw Belasco’s play in London in June 1900 and immediately decided it would be the source for his next work. In November 1902, the libretto was complete, but composition was interrupted in February 1903 after Puccini suffered a serious motor accident (Puccini had a penchant for sports cars, speed boats, and fast women) and underwent a long and painful recovery. After the unmitigated fiasco that was the premiere on February 17, 1904, at La Scala in Milan, Puccini withdrew the opera and revised it for a production at the Teatro Grande in Brescia in May of the same year. This time, the opera succeeded and its popularity has endured. Puccini revised the opera further: for a Covent Garden performance in 1905, for the American premiere in 1906, and finally for a premiere at Paris’s Opéra-Comique. This last set of revisions proved to be the composer’s final word on the piece.

**SYNOPSIS**

Stationed in Nagasaki, American Lieutenant B. F. Pinkerton enters into a temporary marriage with Cio-Cio-San (Butterfly), a fifteen-year-old Japanese girl. Butterfly naively supposes that the marriage is permanent; when her husband leaves her, he promises to return and she believes him. When he does come back three years later, it is with his new American wife, Kate; they have learned through Sharpless, the American consul, that Butterfly has borne Pinkerton’s son—and they have come to take the child. Butterfly responds in the only way her sense of honor will allow.

**ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

Puccini’s tragic work about love across disparate cultures returns to Houston Grand Opera in the production by Olivier and Tony Award–winning British director Michael Grandage seen previously at HGO in 2010, revived by American director Louisa Muller in her HGO main-stage directorial debut. Christopher Oram’s sensitive and painterly set design captures the heartbreaking tenderness of Puccini’s Japanese opera. Grammy Award–winning soprano and Houston Grand Opera Studio alumna Ana María Martínez, who sang her first Cio-Cio-San at HGO in 2010 to great accolades, returns as Butterfly alongside Russian tenor Alexey Dolgov (Pinkerton), last seen at HGO as Tenor/Bacchus in Ariadne auf Naxos. The versatile and compelling American baritone and HGO Studio alum Scott Hendricks (last seen at HGO as Rodrigue in Don Carlos, 2012), returns to the HGO stage as Sharpless. Costa Rican conductor Giancarlo Guerrero, winner of three Grammy Awards, will be making his U.S. operatic debut.
MOZART
THE MAGIC FLUTE
Brown Theater
Sung in English with projected English text

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

Tamino - David Portillo *
Pamina - Lisette Oropesa *
Queen of the Night - Kathryn Lewek *
Sarastro - Morris Robinson
Papageno - Michael Samuel ‡
Speaker - Patrick Carfizzi
Monastatos - Aaron Pegram *
First Lady - D’Ana Lombard †
Second Lady - Megan Samarin †*

Third Lady - Renée Tatum
Papagena - Pureum Jo †*

Mr. Joseph Matulevich and Ms. Sasha Davis/
Nancy and Ted Haywood Fellow

Conductor - Robert Spano
Production - Sir Nicholas Hytner
Revival Director - Ian Rutherford
Set and Costume Designer - Bob Crowley
Original Lighting Designer - Nick Chelton
Chorus Master - Richard Bado ‡

This production was created by the English National Opera

Guarantors: Houston Methodist; Vinson & Elkins LLP; The Wortham Foundation, Inc.
Grand Underwriters: Edward and Frances Bing Fund; Halliburton

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

JANUARY 30  7:30 p.m.
FEBRUARY 1  2 p.m.
FEBRUARY 4  7:30 p.m.
FEBRUARY 7  7:30 p.m.
FEBRUARY 14  7:30 p.m.
Though *The Magic Flute* was mostly composed before *La clemenza di Tito*, its premiere followed that of *Tito*, making it Mozart’s last completed and performed work, and, arguably, his most enigmatic (the Requiem was incomplete when Mozart died). Composed to a libretto by impresario and singer Emanuel Schikaneder, who sang Papageno at the premiere at his Theater auf der Wieden, *The Magic Flute* is noted for being steeped in rationalist and Masonic thought.

**BACKGROUND**

In 1784, Mozart was admitted as an apprentice to a Viennese Masonic lodge named Zur Wohltätigkeit (beneficence). He climbed the ranks of Freemasonry quickly, becoming a master Mason in 1785 and inducting his father, Leopold, into the society later the same year. According to Mozart scholar Maynard Solomon, Mozart’s interest in the group lay with the rationalist and Enlightenment thinkers, inspired by the humanist philosophies of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Denis Diderot, rather than with Freemasons who gravitated toward the occult.

Both Schikaneder and Mozart were members of the Viennese Masonic community at a time when Freemasonry was under threat by the Roman Catholic Empress Maria Theresa, the mother of Emperor Joseph II. Beginning with Mozart scholar Moritz Zille in 1886, commentators have identified all of the opera’s major characters with living political figures during Mozart’s time: Maria Theresa as the repressive and vengeful Queen of the Night, Tamino as Emperor Joseph II, Pamina as the Austrian people, Monostatos as the reactionary clergy, and finally Sarastro as Ignaz von Born, a prominent scientist who led the largest and most aristocratic Freemason lodge in Vienna, Zur wahren Eintracht (true concord).

The Magic Flute was an overwhelming success upon its premiere on September 30, 1791. Mozart died only a few weeks after its premiere on December 5, 1791, not living to see the hundredth performance celebration in November 1792. Emanuel Schikaneder was grief-stricken at Mozart’s death; he promptly produced a benefit performance of *The Magic Flute* for Mozart’s widow, Constanze, who was nearly penniless at Mozart’s death. When Schikaneder mounted a performance of *La clemenza di Tito* in 1798, he wrote: “Mozart’s work is beyond all praise. One feels only too keenly, on hearing this or any other of his music, what the Art has lost in him.”

**SYNOPSIS**

Three Ladies, attendants of the Queen of the Night, rescue Prince Tamino from a fearsome dragon. The Queen of the Night asks the handsome stranger to rescue her daughter, Pamina, who is being held captive by an evil sorcerer, Sarastro. Tamino, smitten upon seeing a portrait of Pamina, agrees. To protect him on this mission, the Three Ladies provide him with a magic flute and the unwilling company of the Queen’s birdcatcher, Papageno. Three Genii guide the pair into the domain of Sarastro, where Tamino quickly learns that things are not as they seem. Tamino locates Pamina, who returns his love, but Sarastro requires that Tamino pass three trials before the two can be united. He succeeds, and the powers of darkness are vanquished by truth and light.

**ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

*The Magic Flute*—the last of Mozart’s operas to premiere, although it was completed before *La clemenza di Tito*—is noted for its combination of the religious and the fantastical. This production, originally created for the English National Opera by Nicholas Hytner (director of London’s National Theatre), highlights the opera’s Masonic elements and has been described by a London critic as “lucid, elegant with an unforced comic charm.” Director Ian Rutherford will stage the revival. In a cast marked by exciting up-and-coming singers, tenor David Portillo (Tamino) and sopranos Lisette Oropesa (Pamina), and Kathryn Lewek (Queen of the Night) will all be making company debuts. The enthralling big-voiced bass Morris Robinson, last seen at HGO in the concurrent 2013 productions of *Show Boat* (as Joe) and *Don Giovanni* (as the Commendatore), returns to HGO as Sarastro, and HGO Studio alum Michael Sumuel, baritone, carries the role of Papageno. Conductor Robert Spano (music director of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and of the Aspen Music Festival and School) will be on the podium.
WAGNER
DIE WALKÜRE
Brown Theater
Sung in German with projected English translation

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brünnhilde</td>
<td>Christine Goerke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wotan</td>
<td>Iain Paterson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sieglinde</td>
<td>Karita Mattila</td>
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<tr>
<td>Siegmund</td>
<td>Simon O’Neill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fricka</td>
<td>Jamie Barton ‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunding</td>
<td>Ain Anger</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Conductor: Patrick Summers
Production: La Fura dels Baus
Director: Carlus Padrissa
Set Designer: Roland Olbeter
Costume Designer: Chu Uroz
Lighting Designer: Peter van Praet
Video Designer: Franc Aleu

A co-production of Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía, Valencia, and Maggio Musicale, Florence

Premier Guarantors: Houston Grand Opera Endowment, Inc.; Medistar Corporation; Mr. John G. Turner and Mr. Jerry G. Fischer
Grand Guarantors: Robin Angly and Miles Smith; Mrs. Janice Barrow; BBVA Compass
Guarantors: The Brown Foundation; Chevron; Mr. Richard A. Lydecker Jr.; Will L. McLendon; Miss Catherine Jane Merchant; Elizabeth Phillips; Mr. and Mrs. Donald G. Sweeney; John C. and Shelia R. Tweed; Birgitt van Wijk; The Vaughn Foundation
Grand Underwriters: Carol Franc Buck Foundation; Beth Madison; Dr. Jack A. Roth and Dr. Elizabeth Grimm

‡ Former Houston Grand Opera Studio artist
The second—and most often performed—installment in Richard Wagner’s sprawling Ring cycle, Die Walküre was originally called Siegmund und Sieglinde, reflecting the two major characters of this central work. By late November 1851, however, Wagner renamed the opera with its familiar title, Die Walküre, in honor of the ferocious Valkyrie heroine, Brünnhilde, who would remain a central figure throughout the Ring cycle. 

Die Walküre is also famous for the music that opens Act III, known as the Ride of the Valkyries or Walkürenritt. Wagner first wrote the leitmotif labeled Walkürenritt on July 23, 1851, and this music that marks the Valkyrie sisters’ greetings and battle cry is the only piece of ensemble singing in the first three operas of the Ring outside of the Rhinemaidens’ song in Das Rheingold. The Ride of the Valkyries has become a well-established concert piece outside of the opera, and, thanks to Bugs Bunny’s “Kill the Wabbit” and Francis Ford Coppola’s use of the music in Apocalypse Now, it is among Wagner’s most well-known and beloved pieces.

**BACKGROUND**

Wagner completed the first draft of Die Walküre in December 1854 and went on to complete the piece by March 1856. Though Wagner intended Die Walküre to be premiered with the completion of the entire Ring cycle, King Ludwig II of Bavaria, Wagner’s very wealthy and very eccentric patron, insisted that a performance of Die Walküre be given earlier. The work thus received its premiere at the National Theatre in Munich on June 26, 1870. Wagner had much trouble funding his projects until Ludwig II became his patron (the composer did not seem to have qualms about spending other people’s money). Ludwig’s excessive spending on Wagner’s last operas, in addition to the lavish palaces he built (his Neuschwanstein Castle was the inspiration for Disneyland’s Sleeping Beauty Castle) led Bavaria into financial collapse in the early 1880s. The king had been deposed three days before he died mysteriously on June 13, 1886, three years after Wagner died.

It is quite probable that Ludwig was assassinated…partly because of his love of Wagner.

**SYNOPSIS**

Wotan, chief of the gods, has fathered a set of twins—Siegmund and Sieglinde—with a mortal woman, but they have been separated since childhood. Fate brings them together on a stormy night, as an exhausted Siegmund seeks shelter at the home of Sieglinde, unhappily married to Hunding. Learning that Siegmund has killed some of his relatives, Hunding challenges Siegmund to a duel the next day. Alone that night, Sieglinde and Siegmund discover their kinship and fall in love. They flee, but Hunding pursues them; in the ensuing duel, Wotan’s daughter Brünnhilde, leader of the Valkyries, tries to aid Siegmund in defiance of Wotan’s orders. Wotan himself intervenes and both contestants are killed. Brünnhilde knows Siegmund is carrying Siegmund’s child and helps her to escape. Because of Brünnhilde’s disobedience, Wotan strips her of her divinity, puts her into a deep sleep, and leaves her alone on a mountain surrounded by a wall of flames.

**ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

Wagner’s Die Walküre marks the second in Houston Grand Opera’s four part historic installment of the Ring cycle. This eye-popping production, directed by Carlus Padrissa of the legendary Catalan stage collective La Fura dels Baus, has been called “the Ring of the twenty-first century,” and features remarkable acrobats, mechanical cranes, and stunning video art by Franc Aleu. La Fura dels Baus takes Wagner’s titanic work and presents it in a straightforward and contemporary manner; it is a marvel of stagecraft.

The all-star cast features Grammy Award–winning dramatic soprano Christine Goerke in her highly anticipated first staged U.S. performances of Brünnhilde. After a great success at HGO as Wotan in Das Rheingold, Scottish bass-baritone Iain Paterson continues his portrayal of the chief of the gods; Metropolitan Opera veteran and world-renowned Finnish soprano Karita Mattila sings Sieglinde opposite the Siegmund of New Zealand tenor Simon O’Neill; and American mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton, the 2013 winner of the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition and an alumna of the HGO Studio, continues her portrayal of Fricka. HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers conducts.
Sweeney Todd

**CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM**

Sweeney Todd: Nathan Gunn  
Mrs. Lovett: Susan Bullock  
Tobias Ragg: Nicholas Phan ‡  
Judge Turpin: Jake Gardner  
Johanna: Megan Samarin †  
Anthony Hope: Morgan Pearse †  
Beggar Woman: Cynthia Clayton  
Conductor: James Lowe ‡  
Director: Lee Blakeley  
Set and Costume Designer: Tanya McCallin  
Lighting Designer: Rick Fisher  
Chorus Master: Richard Bado ‡  

† Houston Grand Opera Studio artist  
‡ Former Houston Grand Opera Studio artist

A co-production of Théâtre du Châtelet, San Francisco Opera, and Houston Grand Opera.  
Production premiered at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris on April 22, 2011.

**Grand Underwriter:** Brucie and Andrew Moore

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**Sung in English with projected English text**

APRIL 24: 7:30 p.m.  
APRIL 26: 2 p.m.  
APRIL 29: 7:30 p.m.  
MAY 2: 7:30 p.m.  
MAY 8: 7:30 p.m.  
MAY 9: 7:30 p.m.
The fictional character Sweeney Todd—a barber who killed his victims at his shop on Fleet Street and, with the assistance of Mrs. Lovett, baked them into pies sold to unsuspecting clients—made his debut in the Victorian serial *The String of Pearls: a Romance*, written by James Malcolm Rymer and Thomas Peckett Prest and published in 1846–1847. The story was so popular that before the serial was completed, it had been adapted as a play at the Britannia Theatre in London’s East End. In 1850, the serial was published as a 732-page book, *The String of Pearls: The Barber of Fleet Street, A Domestic Romance*. This spawned several spin-offs: a plagiarized version of the book appeared in America in the early 1850s, followed by another dramatic adaptation in 1865, a film in 1936 starring Tod Slaughter, a 1959 ballet composed by Sir Malcolm Arnold, and finally the 1973 Christopher Bond play that formed the basis of Stephen Sondheim’s 1979 musical *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.

**BACKGROUND AND SYNOPSIS**

Though no one has ever been able to definitively establish the historicity of Sweeney Todd, there are precursors both in history and in literature. In revolutionary Paris, a Jacobin barber and wigmaker living in rue de la Harpe supposedly cut his customers’ throats. In seventeenth-century Scotland, there is evidence that a clan leader known as Sawney Bean ate his adversaries. And, of course, Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* tricks a mother into eating her sons served in meat pies...sound familiar?

Stephen Sondheim and his collaborator, the playwright Hugh Wheeler, use the same setting as the 1973 Christopher Bond play: mid-nineteenth century London (the original story was set in late eighteenth-century London). In this version, Sweeney Todd is a redemptive anti-hero—Benjamin Barker, a.k.a. Sweeney Todd, returns to London after fifteen years of exile on trumped-up charges to find that his wife poisoned herself after being raped by the judge who sentenced him. In such an instance, it is only natural for Sweeney Todd to get revenge using his skill as a barber. His proximity to piemaker Mrs. Lovett is one of those great moments of dramatic serendipity.

**ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

Last seen at Houston Grand Opera in the 1983–84 season, Stephen Sondheim’s thriller musical *Sweeney Todd* about a throat-slashing barber and the cannibalistic meat pies returns to HGO in a shadowy and harrowing production by Lee Blakeley. The large, two-tiered set designed by Tanya McCallin thrusts audiences into Industrial-era London and fully captures what Sondheim once termed a “dark operetta” and a “thriller for the stage.”

American baritone Nathan Gunn makes his role debut as Sweeney Todd in his first appearance at HGO since his delightful Figaro in *The Barber of Seville* (2011), alongside British dramatic soprano Susan Bullock, who will be making her first foray into musical theater as Mrs. Lovett.

Grammy-nominated James Lowe, who was a pianist/coach in the HGO Studio from 1998 to 2000 and has been making an impressive career conducting opera and musical theater (currently music director of the Broadway revival of *Les Misérables*), returns to conduct.

Nathan Gunn, Susan Bullock, and James Lowe
HGO Assistant Artistic Director Mena Mark Hanna introduces Simon Callow, librettist and director for HGO’s world premiere of the one-man opera *A Christmas Carol*. The opera was composed by Iain Bell and will star Anthony Dean Griffey.

**A DICKENS OF A GUY**
Simon Callow is a man who does it all. An Olivier Award–winning actor, he created the role of Mozart in Peter Shaffer’s Amadeus at the Royal National Theatre in 1979 and went on to star as the industrious Schikaneder in Miloš Forman’s film of the play. He later appeared as The Reverend Mr. Beebe in A Room with a View, Gareth in Four Weddings and a Funeral, and Sir Edmund Tilney in Shakespeare in Love, the last of which earned a Screen Actors Guild Award for outstanding performance by a cast.

In addition to acting, Callow is a writer and director, having written his first book with the encouragement of the literary agent Peggy Ramsay—Being an Actor (1984)—which critiqued director-dominated theater and possibly marks the first time an actor publicly came out about his homosexuality. Moreover, he has written a two-volume biography of Orson Welles; the memoir Love is Where it Falls; and several books, both scholarly and artistic, derived from his work on his one-man plays: My Life in Pieces about his collaboration with Shakespeare scholar Jonathan Bate on his one-man play Being Shakespeare, and, of course, his best-selling Charles Dickens and The Great Theatre of the World, written during and after his creation of the one-man telling of A Christmas Carol.

Callow also has had a lifelong passion for music and has directed productions of Cavalli’s La Calista, Chabrier’s Le roi malgré lui, Menotti’s The Consul, and Mozart’s The Magic Flute (which is, according to him, the hardest and most fulfilling opera to direct). His passion for music also led to a one-man show that explores Richard Wagner, taking audiences to a “dark, murky, unsettling place,” as Callow calls it.

Mena Mark Hanna: How did you get your start in theater?

Simon Callow: I wrote a note to Laurence Olivier who was then running the National Theatre. It was a piece of fan mail, exuberant in its praise and curious in tone. He wrote back with an offer of work, and I started in the box office of the National Theatre. There I got my training watching great actors rehearse.

MMH: How did you get into opera, and what does opera offer you, as a director, that theater cannot?

SC: My grandmother was a singer; I listened to all her old shellacs of Gobbi, Luigi Alva, Tauber, etc. And then one day when I was still at school—at seventeen—I walked past the Royal Opera House and saw that Gobbi was appearing, so I got a ticket in the gods [what Americans would call the nosebleeds] for a few sellings and saw Il trittico, in which he sang both Michele and Schicchi. A wonderful baptism. I never believed what everybody told me: that singers can’t act. These were two of the best acting performances I ever saw on any stage.

Obviously, as director, I get the opportunity to be involved in the art form I love almost as deeply as any but from which I am disbarred as a performer because of lack of ability. For A Christmas Carol, Iain sought me out. He knew that Dickens was something I did and came to me with the idea.

MMH: How does one separate the duties of actor and director?

SC: They’re totally different. Two different jobs. No connection, except that both happen in a theater or on film.

MMH: Why Dickens? And why A Christmas Carol?

SC: Dickens is infinitely abundant, swarming with life and passion. What more can you ask for from an opera? Though, weirdly, no one, as far as I know (apart from Arthur Benjamin’s Tale of Two Cities), has ever attempted it. Imagine an opera from Great Expectations or Oliver Twist.

MMH: How did you get the idea of the Narrator encompassing all of the characters of A Christmas Carol?

SC: It’s the way it’s written. The original, I mean. This wasn’t unique at the time of A Christmas Carol (published as a novella on December 19, 1843). The idea of the “monopolylogue,” or theater in which one actor takes on several characters, was pioneered in the early nineteenth century by English actor Charles Matthews. In his play At Home, he played every character. This is further passed on to Dickens; the character Alfred Jingle in Dickens’s novel The Pickwick Papers was inspired by Charles Matthews. In the twentieth century, the American actress Ruth Draper used “monopolylogging” in her brilliant and hilarious The Italian Lesson.

MMH: Is this the first libretto you’ve written? If so, is there more of this type of work in the future?

SC: Yup. It’s the first libretto and, yes, there is more of this type of work in the future.
UNSUNG HEROES: THE COSTUME SHOP

BY PERRYN LEECH
HGO MANAGING DIRECTOR
When we refer to HGO as a family, it means many different things to different people. To three members of staff in the costume shop, it is more literal, as they are a real family-within-a-family. Our head of costumes for the past six years has been Norma Cortez and she leans heavily on her sister, costume coordinator Myrna Vallejo, and her mother, draper/cutter Mercedes Ramirez, to help complete the department’s demands in any given season. This remarkable family is at the core of the HGO costume shop, which is highly regarded by the many designers whose costumes are produced here each season.

Perryn Leech: Mercedes, how did you originally start sewing?

Mercedes Ramirez: I was born in the United States but lived in Mexico when I was younger. I was in a very hard-working and highly skilled family, but there was no one who really sewed or made clothes in my family, so I learned how to do that. I was about twelve when I started making my own clothes, and then very soon for the rest of the family. I used whatever fabric we could find. I then was asked to make clothes for other people as well and was very nervous at first. I found the first time they tried on the clothes to be very nerve wracking—if it didn’t fit or they weren’t happy, I had no spare or different fabric I could use!

PL: Were other members of your family also making things?

MR: Yes. My brother was also a very fine woodworker, and my father was a shoe designer and maker. He had a number of different machines that he used for making shoes and eventually I was able to utilize them in the clothing I was making. These machines made it possible to use a wide variety of fabrics and materials, which has proved very useful.

PL: How did you end up settling in Houston?

MR: When I came to the United States, I originally moved to Chicago. At the time, I was pregnant with my fifth child (Myrna) and so I had to leave my other children with their grandparents in Mexico. I had friends in Chicago with whom I could stay, and I thought opportunities existed there for me to earn money to support my family back in Mexico. I had friends in Chicago with whom I could stay, and I thought opportunities existed there for me to earn money to support my family back in Mexico. When I got to Chicago I waited tables and worked anywhere else that I could earn some money. I also borrowed a sewing machine from my friends and started to make and alter clothing to earn extra money. After a period of time, I realized I wanted and needed to be closer to Mexico in order to see more of my young family and so I decided Houston was the place to be. Eventually I was able to earn enough to relocate my family from Mexico to be with me in Houston.
PL: It sounds as though sewing and being creative was always in your blood then, Myrna?

Myrna Vallejo: Yes, but I wanted to know more about design as well as the practical side, so I enrolled at Houston Community College to do a course study in fashion design. I was twenty-one at the time, and, having previously worked with my mother, I learned so much and observed what tremendous effort and self-taught skills she put into her work. I was very eager to learn the basics of design as well, though, so that I could be creative as I worked in the industry.

PL: How did HGO become part of your working life?

MV: While I was working on my college courses, a friend of mine from school had been hired to do some overhire...
stitching in the costume shop at HGO and recommended me when they had some extra work. I was originally hired for just a four-week assignment but at the end of that, I was asked to stay—and I have been here ever since! When the next big show came in and the costume shop needed more skilled overhire stitchers, I suggested hiring Mercedes and Norma.

PL: Now you are not just working on sewing and making projects anymore—you are one of Norma’s assistants. Does your fashion design training help your work in that capacity?

MV: Yes, the training is definitely useful. Also the experience of having worked in all the various capacities of the costume shop as well as having training in all facets of costume construction and finishing allow me to remain unfazed by whatever is thrown at us by designers.

PL: Norma, I know you are hard-working and come from a creative and skilled background, but how did you use those tools to become head of costumes?

Norma Cortez: I had worked with Mercedes on various projects for many years and was probably the one from our family whom she called on most consistently to assist—especially with rush jobs. I was very young when I got married and started a family and never imagined I would bring up a family while continuing to do sewing and finishing work with her. However, when Myrna reached out to say that HGO was looking for overhire help, both Mercedes and I ended up coming to work. The production was Resurrection and I was fascinated by the amazing costumes, how they were made, and the different materials and techniques, as well as how they were fitted, painted, and finished.

PL: When I arrived at HGO seven years ago, you were the administrative assistant for the department. You had worked in all areas of the costume shop in various different roles, and all of that prepared you for the top position.

NC: Yes, I had been one of the assistants the season before and was getting more experience in the opera costume–making world. Then the previous head of costumes left and I decided to apply for the job of running the whole department.

PL: Yes, I was your line manager and I remember reviewing the qualifications of all the applicants. You certainly had less experience than some of the others who had been running shops, but you had
such a great desire to further develop the costume shop. You had already earned the respect of your colleagues through your hard work and skills. I believed that was a combination for success and so elevating you to the head position felt absolutely like the right thing to do.

NC: I was so honored to get the position from you but I knew that it would mean so much hard work, and I would need incredible support from all the shop staff. They knew that during the course of my career I myself have done the same tasks I was asking them to do, which gives me a useful perspective. As I look back over the past six years, I realize how fortunate I have been to work with so many of the world's top costume designers. I find that I am constantly learning in this business—there are skills, techniques, and tips that come from working with different
designers and staff members from other companies. Unfortunately, you also have to learn things that don’t work as well through trial and error! We have a really happy and very skilled workshop at HGO and everyone is open to hearing and learning from others whenever we can.

PL: All of that coupled with a work ethic that is clearly deeply rooted in you and your family.

NC: We all learn so much from our family—and especially someone like our mother as a role model—that you can achieve a lot by working hard and always being open and willing to learn. I am very proud of what we have achieved with the HGO shop and the costumes that we produce. It really is an incredible honor to be able to lead this great team—especially my sister and mother.

The HGO Costume Shop is rightly acclaimed by many of the world-renowned costume designers we welcome to Houston each year as one of the most creative and hard-working in the country. Additionally, the department has a reputation for truly enjoying their work and collectively creating an environment where creativity can develop and flourish. The core within the department is a remarkable family who know that with hard work, coupled with brilliant technique, you can produce quality output of the very highest standard.
Imagine you are sitting in the audience of the Brown Theater. The lights dim, and your heart begins to race with the thrill that always hits you just before the conductor raises the baton. The curtain rises, and onstage, basked in light, stands the leading soprano, ready to transport you and your 2,000 neighbors to another world for the next three hours. You take in the painstakingly designed set before focusing on the singer’s beautiful costume and finally her face. When her voice begins to fill the darkness, your excitement is mingled with a note of pride as you realize that you were the one who made her presence possible. This is the memorable experience of an HGO main-stage artist underwriter.

At HGO, we never forget that every aspect of our work, from the supertitles projected above the stage to the HGOco teaching artists who engage with communities throughout Houston, can only happen through the tremendous generosity of our friends and donors. Even during seasons of record-breaking attendance—and we have been fortunate in recent years—ticket revenue makes up a relatively small percentage of our income. HGO must rely on donor contributions for seventy percent of our annual operating expenses.

Main-stage artist underwriting is a giving opportunity that allows donors to contribute to HGO’s artistic work in a direct and tangible way—by financially supporting an individual artist in a production or series of productions. Opera is an expensive art form to produce, and HGO is committed to providing Houston audiences with the highest-quality opera available anywhere. The main-stage artist underwriting initiative, which has its roots in the longstanding HGO Studio underwriting program, helps to guarantee that HGO can continue to bring to Houston the best and brightest talent that opera has to offer.

Artist underwriter contributions support artist contract fees, housing, and other expenses. For Mathilda and Michael Cochran, longtime subscribers who underwrote HGO Studio alumna and 2013 Cardiff Singer of the World Jamie Barton as Fricka in last season’s Das Rheingold, the decision to focus their giving on a specific artist came easily.

Says Mathilda, “I’ve been an HGO trustee for several years, so I’ve had the opportunity to learn about the company’s operations from the financial side. My husband [Michael] and I have been so impressed by how responsibly and efficiently HGO is run—all while consistently producing marvelous opera. We usually designate our annual gift to general support and trust that HGO will use it wisely.

“But last year marked the first-ever Houston production of Wagner’s Ring cycle, and we understood the magnitude of the event, for both the company and the city. When [HGO Managing Director] Perryn Leech asked us to support Jamie, it seemed natural to increase our giving level and dedicate our contribution in that direction.”

HGO donors Jack Roth and Liz Grimm also found the Ring to be the right project to begin supporting a main-stage artist.
“The prospect of following one artist’s career, of getting to know her as her star continues to rise, of watching her take the stage and being able to say, ‘We did that. We made that happen’—here was an opportunity to be concretely involved in something really special.”
—Mathilda Cochran

“We have seen how artists can create new insights into a piece, and in Wagner’s work—with its musical and dramatic richness—this can happen with each performance. Christine [Goerke] is part of an exciting new generation of Wagnerian singers, and Liz and I wanted to ensure that the HGO production would benefit from her superb talents.”
—Jack Roth
Jack explains, “We have seen how artists can create new insights into a piece, and in Wagner’s work—with its musical and dramatic richness—this can happen with each performance. Christine is part of an exciting new generation of Wagnerian singers, and Liz and I wanted to ensure that the HGO production would benefit from her superb talents.”

Although the Cochrans and Jack Roth and Liz Grimm chose the Ring to take the plunge into main-stage artist underwriting, the practice is not new to HGO. In 2010, the Lynn Wyatt Great Artist Fund was established with a gift of $1 million from Oscar Wyatt in honor of Lynn Wyatt’s years of philanthropy and service to the company. The endowed fund was designed to ensure that HGO could continue to bring the world’s best operatic artists to Houston. HGO’s inaugural Lynn Wyatt Great Artist was Ana María Martínez, who opened the 2010–11 season as Cio-Cio San in a sold-out run of Puccini’s Madame Butterfly. Since then, honorees have included Joyce DiDonato (2011–12), John Caird (2012–13), Susan Graham (2013–14), and Simon O’Neill (2014–15).

After years of contributing to HGO’s general operations, Mathilda Cochran describes the gratification that comes with underwriting a main-stage artist: “Michael and I always knew when we gave to HGO that our gift would be put to the right use, from process to product. But the prospect of following one artist’s career, of getting to know her as her star continues to rise, of watching her take the stage and being able to say, ‘We did that. We made that happen’—here was an opportunity to be concretely involved in something really special.”

Donors who underwrite main-stage artists also point out the unexpected joys of developing relationships with the singers. Mathilda and Michael were able to attend one of the rehearsals of Das Rheingold and had a memorable dinner with Jamie Barton after the premiere, during which the singer shared with them the story of her journey into opera. Jack Roth and Liz Grimm hope to have the chance to meet Christine Goerke when she arrives in Houston to begin rehearsals for Die Walküre. The day after the couple made their pledge to support the renowned soprano in the role of Brünnhilde, she wrote them personally to express her gratitude.

HGO is tremendously indebted to the Opera’s main-stage underwriters, whose generosity enables artists from all over the world to perform at the Wortham Center. Their gifts benefit Houston audiences most of all.
Inspire.

Goal: $165 million by 12-31-14

Now, more than ever, people are hungry to discover beauty and meaning in their lives. To be inspired beyond the ordinary. To be transformed by great art.

You can help build the most innovative, transformative opera company in America. Right here in Houston.

$161 million as of 08-18-14

Call 713-546-0200 or visit HGO.org/InspiringPerformance to learn how you can help.
Leisurely, relaxing summers are just not part of a young singer’s life! Most of the HGO Studio artists have been working in various programs all summer, and, by the time you receive this season preview issue of Opera Cues, they will be immersed in rehearsals for our annual Studio Showcase on September 16.

Studio Showcase is a program of opera scenes—excerpts from a variety of opera repertoire. Programs like these are great for young artists because they get to show off their versatility by performing multiple roles in a single evening.

Audiences also love the variety: this year’s Showcase selections come from such disparate repertoire as Mozart’s Così fan tutte and Stephen Sondheim’s Sweeney Todd (both of which will be performed on the main stage at HGO this season), as well as Bizet’s romantic Pearl Fishers, Donizetti’s farcical Don Pasquale, and more.

If you’ve never been to a Studio Showcase before, I hope you’ll make this your first—this year, like last year, tickets are free to HGO subscribers, and in fact they are available only to subscribers. But reservations are necessary, so don’t forget to make yours at 713-228-OPERA (6737).

Thanks to those of you who never miss an opportunity to support the Studio artists in their various performances—Studio Showcase, on the main stage, in recital at Rienzi, in Concert of Arias, and more. Your interest in their growth contributes to their growth as artists, and we are grateful.

Laura Canning, Director
HGO Studio Faculty & Staff

Laura Canning, Director
Bradley Moore, Music Director
Mr. and Mrs. Albert B. Alkek Chair
Amra Catovic, Studio Administrator
Carlisle Floyd, Artistic Advisor
Stephen King, Director of Vocal Instruction
The Harold Block and Janet Sims/Jill and Allyn Risley Chair
Patrick Summers, Conducting Instructor and Coach
Margaret Alkek Williams Chair
Patrick Harvey, Resident Coach
Mr. and Mrs. James A. Elkins Endowed Chair
Peter Pasztor, Resident Coach
Brian Connelly, Piano Instructor
Sponsored by Ursula and Saúl Balagura
Timothy Hester, Piano Instructor
Jordan de Souza, Vocal Coach
Gerardo Felisatti, Vocal Coach
David Hanlon, Vocal Coach
Laurie Rogers, Vocal Coach
Dr. Irene Spiegelman, German Diction Coach
Christa Gaug, German Instructor
Sponsored by Marsha L. Montemayor
Enrica Vagliani Gray, Italian Instructor

Jonathan Ludwig, Russian Instructor
Julie Muller, English Instructor
Nicole Uhlig, French Instructor
Sponsored by Jennifer Sickler
Deborah Birnbaum, Guest Coach
John Fisher, Guest Coach
James J. Drach Endowed Chair
Myra Huang, Guest Coach
Laura Lee Blanton Studio Award through the Scurlock Foundation
Eric Melear, Guest Coach
Kevin Murphy, Guest Coach
James Robinson, Showcase Director
Pierre Vallet, Guest Coach
Evans Family Endowed Chair

The HGO Studio is grateful for the in-kind support of McGladrey, LLP.
The Young Artists Vocal Academy (YAVA) is sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Robert N. Wakefield, Mr. Patrick Carfizzi, and the HGO Guild.

Hotel accommodations for YAVA generously provided by the Lancaster Hotel.
United Airlines is the official airline of Houston Grand Opera and Concert of Arias.

Additional support for Houston Grand Opera Studio is provided by the following funds within the Houston Grand Opera Endowment, Inc.:
Audrey Jones Beck Endowment Fund
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John M. O’Quinn Endowment Fund
Shell Lubricants (formerly Pennzoil-Quaker State Company) Fund
Mary C. Gayler Snook Endowment Fund

HGO Studio Artists 2014–15

PEIXIN CHEN, bass
PUREUM JO, soprano
Mr. Joseph Matulevich and Ms. Sasha Davis/Nancy and Ted Haywood Fellow
D’ANA LOMBARD, soprano
Lynne Murray Sr. Educational Foundation Fellow
SAHAR NOURI, pianist/coach
John M. O’Quinn Foundation and Audrey Jones Beck Endowed Fellow
MORGAN PEARSE, baritone
Dr. Ellen R. Gritz and Mr. Milton D. Rosenau Jr. Fellow
THOMAS RICHARDS, bass-baritone
Mr. and Mrs. Philip A. Bahr Fellow

MEGAN SAMARIN, mezzo-soprano
Michelle Beale and Dick Anderson Fellow
SOFIA SELOWSKY, mezzo-soprano
Mr. and Mrs. James W. Crownover Fellow
EMILY SENTURIA, conductor/pianist
Beth Madison Fellow
REGINALD SMITH JR., baritone
Mr. and Mrs. Harlan C. Stai, Terrell Tone Owen Memorial Endowed Fund at the Community Foundation of Abilene Endowed Fellow
CHRISTOPHER TURBESSI, pianist/coach
Ms. Marianne Kah/Joan Hacken Bitar, M.D., Fellow

SAVE THE DATES

Don’t miss these opportunities to hear HGO Studio artists.

STUDIO SHOWCASE 2014–15

September 16, 2014
Enjoy a fully staged program of opera scenes in the Wortham Center’s Cullen Theater. Tickets free to subscribers. Call 713-228-OPERA (6737).

RECITALS AT RIENZI

December 6 and 7, 2014
March 13 and 14, 2015
May 7 and 10, 2015
Recitals are held at Rienzi, the decorative arts wing of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, at 1406 Kirby Drive. Call 713-639-7800 for information.
CINDERELLA IN SPAIN OPENS OPERA TO GO! SEASON

Opera to Go! kicks off its season with one of its most beloved children’s operas—Cinderella in Spain. This bilingual take on a true classic is enticing to audiences of all ages. Cinderella in Spain tours to area schools and community groups from September 22 through December 19. Be sure to mark your calendars for two free performances at Miller Outdoor Theatre September 25 and 26 at 11 a.m. daily.

Opera to Go! is also pleased to present HGO’s fifty-sixth world premiere this winter with Mark Buller’s The Pastry Prince (An Italian Folktale). This clever comedy, with a libretto by acclaimed lyricist Charles Anthony Silvestri, combines several Italian folktales and will be sure to dazzle audiences through the spring. Public performances will be held January 29–31, 2015, at the Heinen Theater on the central campus of Houston Community College. The Pastry Prince will tour from January 26 through May 29, 2015.

To book a tour, call 713-546-0231 or visit HGO.org/operatogo.

READY FOR COLLEGE! HIGH SCHOOL VOICE STUDIO 2013–14

Congratulations to the High School Voice Studio Class of 2014. Three scholarship winners were named at last May’s Graduation Recital held at Belin Chapel, Houston Baptist University. These scholarships will assist the winners’ continued music study at their respective universities.

All three winners are sopranos and all chose Texas universities. First-place winner Marissa Pyron will attend Southern Methodist University, while second-place winner Lauren Gusman will pursue her studies at University of Texas–Austin. Misty Birtcher, who won third place, will study at Southern Methodist University.

Last season, the High School Voice Studio (HSVS) was led by Karen Reeves, who founded HVS and is also director of the HGO Children’s Chorus, along with HBU voice professor Jason Lester.

From left: Dr. Jason Lester, voice instructor; Madison Rice; Marissa Fronberger; Lauren Gusman; Marissa Pyron; Misty Birtcher; Taylor Gaines; Michael Skarke; and HVS Director Karen Reeves
SHIP CHANNEL, AHoy!
This season, Houston Grand Opera joins the Houston Ship Channel's centennial celebrations with an original song cycle based on firsthand accounts of life and work in and around the Port of Houston. To celebrate one of our city's most fascinating hubs of industry, HGOco has commissioned composer D. J. Sparr and writer Janine Joseph to create a work based on interviews collected through the Working the Port project conducted by the Houston Arts Alliance Folklife and Traditional Arts Program. Performances will take place this winter at the Houston Public Library's Julia Ideson Building in connection with Houston Arts Alliance's exhibition Stories of a Workforce: Celebrating the Centennial of the Houston Ship Channel.

Dates will be posted online at HGO.org/HGOco as they become available.

STORYBOOK OPERA TOURS NEW YORK
While HGO’s production of The Passenger was on tour to New York’s Lincoln Center Festival, HGOco’s Storybook Opera, a literacy program that brings books to life through character and song, was on a New York tour as well. Storybook Opera artist Sandra Campbell performed a reading of David Grossman’s book Itamar Meets a Rabbit, a story about a boy and a rabbit who overcome their fears of each other. Using a piano score she created, Campbell presented eight performances to summer school students in a space at the Park Avenue Armory, the historic building where HGO presented The Passenger in the soaring Drill Hall.
**JUDY AND RICHARD AGEE**

HGO subscribers since 2000–01, Judy and Richard “Dick” Agee are ardent believers in the power of storytelling through words and music. To demonstrate their belief, they partnered with the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston Inner-City Catholic Schools on a three-year initiative to bring HGOco programs Opera to Go!, Storybook Opera, and Opera Camp: Create an Opera to students who might not otherwise be exposed to opera. Judy and Dick, the founder and chairman of Wapiti Energy LLC and Bayou Well Holdings Company LLC, are members of HGO’s Founders Council for Artistic Excellence. Beyond their support of general operations and HGOco, the Opera is grateful for the couple’s generous contributions to Concert of Arias (2012–15) and HGO’s main stage, including last season’s *Aida* and *Rigoletto* and this season’s *Otello* and *Madame Butterfly*—three out of four by Verdi, one of their favorite composers.

**ROBIN ANGLY AND MILES SMITH**

HGO subscribers since the 2005–06 season, Robin Angly and Miles Smith 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’s great passion for music has led to their engagement with other local organizations: they serve on the board of Ars Lyrica Houston and are benefactors of the Soma International Foundation. Robin is additionally on the boards of Inprint and Da Camera. Robin and Miles have been donors to HGO special events and the Young Artists Vocal Academy, and most recently supported HGO’s main-stage production of *Das Rheingold* and *The Passenger* at Lincoln Center Festival. They are chairing the 2015 Opera Ball.

**DENISE AND PHILIP Bahr**

This season marks Denise and Philip Bahr’s twentieth as HGO subscribers. The couple has supported the Opera since 1996, underwriting special events and main-stage productions (most recently *Il trovatore* in 2012–13). Denise and Philip have a special love for the HGO Studio, where opera’s rising stars have benefited from their support since 2000. Denise, currently an HGO trustee, is a former member of the HGO Board of Directors, and the Opera has been privileged to have Philip’s participation on the board since 1998. Beyond serving as champions of HGO, Denise and Philip have a deep commitment to music that extends to their support of University of Houston Moores School Society, Houston Symphony, and Houston Ballet. The Opera was honored to have the couple chair the 2010 Opera Ball.

**JANICE BARROW**

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

HGO is privileged to partner with BBVA Compass, a Sunbelt-based financial institution that operates 684 branches, including 352 in Texas, 89 in Alabama, 78 in Arizona, 62 in California, 45 in Florida, 38 in Colorado, and 20 in New Mexico. BBVA Compass is committed to financial education, diversity and inclusion, and supporting the arts in its communities. The bank is the U.S. subsidiary of BBVA, a Spain-based global financial services group founded in 1857, and is a well-known champion of Spanish art. BBVA Compass was the lead corporate sponsor of HGO’s Ring (created by the Spanish production team La Fura dels Baus) and also supports the NEXUS Initiative, HGO’s affordability program. David Powell, BBVA Compass’s co-head of the U.S. corporate and investment banking business and head of global clients and investment banking, serves on the HGO Board of Directors.

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 throughout Inspiring Performance—The Campaign for Houston Grand Opera, which has been critical to the company’s unprecedented growth and success in recent years. The Foundation’s total campaign contributions top $6 million.

ANNE AND ALBERT CHAO

Anne and Albert Chao 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 the HGO Endowment Board, and is the former chair of the current fundraising campaign, Inspiring Performance—The Campaign for Houston Grand Opera. Over the years, the Chao’s have sponsored HGO special events, the HGO Studio, HGOco’s Song of Houston, and main-stage productions. The couple has also supported the HGO Endowment through their family foundation, the Ting Tsung and Wei Fong Chao Foundation.

CONOCOPHILLIPS

ConocoPhillips is a global, independent energy exploration and production company that operates multinationally but calls Houston home. For over thirty years, ConocoPhillips has supported various programs at HGO, from special events to main-stage productions, including the 2014–15 season-opening production, Verdi’s Otello. In 2009, the company gave a major multiyear grant to establish ConocoPhillips New Initiatives, a far-reaching program that allows HGOco to develop new and innovative education and community collaboration programs. HGO is fortunate to have Janet L. Kelly, ConocoPhillips’s senior vice president, legal, general counsel, and corporate secretary, serve on the HGO Board of Directors and also as chairman of the HGO Endowment.

BOBBIE-VEE AND GERALD COONEY

Bobbie-Vee and Gerald “Jerry” Cooney have been HGO subscribers since 1979, and have generously supported HGO productions of the most beloved classics of the Italian repertory, including Aida, La bohème, Cavalleria rusticana/Pagliacci, Tosca, and Madame Butterfly. In the 2010–11 season, the Cooneys helped make possible the CD recording of HGO’s innovative commission Cruzar la Cara de la Luna, the world’s first mariachi opera, and in 2013, they supported Cruzar’s return to the Wortham Center. They have been active supporters of all HGO special events for many years, from Opening Night Dinner, which Bobbie-Vee chaired in 2004, to Concert of Arias, which the couple chaired together in 2014. HGO is honored to have Bobbie-Vee serve on the board of directors.
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 over a half-century history of giving generously to education, healthcare, 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 main-stage season.

THE CULLEN TRUST FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

The Cullen Trust for the Performing Arts has been a lead underwriter of HGO’s main-stage season for nearly thirty 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 of *The Barber of Seville* (2011–12), *Tristan and Isolde* (2012–13), and *Carmen* (2013–14).

THE GENERAL AND MRS. MAURICE HIRSCH MEMORIAL FUND

During their lifetimes, General and Mrs. Maurice Hirsch were longtime Houston philanthropists. Gen. Hirsch (d. 1983) was a partner of the law firm of Hirsch & Westheimer, PC, and established through his will the Winifred Busby Hirsch Charitable Trust. After Mrs. Hirsch’s death in 1990, HGO was named one of the primary beneficiaries of the trust, with distributions going to the HGO Endowment to create the General and Mrs. Maurice Hirsch Memorial Opera Fund. The fund is one of the largest that supports HGO productions, having distributed more than $11 million for that purpose since its inception in 1991. The Opera is indebted to the Hirsches for their generosity in life, the effects of which have been lasting and transformational.

HOUSTON GRAND OPERA ENDOWMENT, INC.

Established and incorporated in 1968, the Houston Grand Opera Endowment (HGOE) is a vital financial management tool that ensures HGO has a reliable, regular source of income. Today, the Endowment contains fifty-four named funds, both unrestricted and restricted to specific purposes, such as HGOco. HGOE annually distributes 5 percent of the Endowment’s average market value to HGO, making it the largest single annual funder of the Opera. HGOE leadership includes Chairman Janet L. Kelly, Senior Chairman Terrylin Neale, and several members of the HGO Board of Directors. This season, HGO is thrilled to have HGOE as the premier guarantor of *A Christmas Carol*.

HOUSTON METHODIST

This year, Houston Grand Opera celebrates nine seasons of partnering with Houston Methodist, the official health care provider for HGO, and the Center for Performing Arts (CPAM). The only center of its kind in the country, CPAM is comprised of a specialized group of more than 100 physicians working collaboratively to address the specific demands placed on performing artists. In addition to the first-rate medical care CPAM provides HGO artists, Houston Methodist also generously supports HGO special events and main-stage productions such as *La traviata* (2011–12), *La bohème* (2012–13), *Aida* (2013–14), and this season’s *The Magic Flute*. HGO is fortunate to have Dr. C. Richard Stasney, founder of CPAM, and Dr. Mauro Ferrari 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 main-stage 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 main-stage productions such as last season’s *Rigoletto*, 2013’s *Show Boat*, and the world’s first mariachi opera, *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*, in 2010 and 2013.
RICHARD AND NANCY KINDER
HGO first welcomed Nancy and Richard Kinder to the Opera family when they became subscribers during the 2000–01 season. Richard is co-founder, chairman, and CEO of Kinder Morgan, and Nancy is a focused philanthropist whose work has positively impacted communities throughout Houston and beyond. Rich and Nancy established the Kinder Foundation in 1997 to provide impactful gifts to projects dedicated to urban green space, education, and quality-of-life issues in the Greater Houston area. Rich and Nancy’s passion for enhancing Houston life has led to their involvement with numerous nonprofit institutions, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Rice University’s Kinder Institute for Urban Research; DePelchin Children’s Center Foundation; Discovery Green Conservancy; and MD Anderson Cancer Center. HGO is indebted to the Kinders for their visionary support in areas including general operations, main-stage productions, special events, and especially HGOco, the Opera’s innovative education and community collaboration initiative.

BETH MADISON
This season marks Beth Madison’s twentieth as an HGO subscriber. HGO has had the honor of her support since 2004, first through her company, Madison Benefits Group, and later as an individual donor. Immediate past chair of the HGO Board of Directors, Beth shows no signs of scaling down her involvement—she currently serves on the Executive, Finance, and HGO Studio Committees, and is an active member of HGO’s Founders Council, supporting HGO special events and, last season, three operas on HGO’s main stage: The Passenger, A Coffin in Egypt, and Das Rheingold. Beth has received several distinctions for her robust community service, including induction into the Greater Houston Women’s Hall of Fame and a 2010 President’s Medallion from the University of Houston. In 2014, Governor Rick Perry appointed her to the University of Houston System Board of Regents. Beth was named a 2014 Woman of Distinction Ambassador by ABC13.

M.D. ANDERSON FOUNDATION
The M.D. Anderson Foundation has provided general operating support to HGO for more than thirty years. Based in Houston, the M.D. Anderson Foundation was established in 1936 by Tennessee-born, Houston-transplanted cotton mogul 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 the communities through the arts. HGO is privileged to have such a longstanding and committed partner as the M.D. Anderson Foundation in enhancing the quality of life for all Houstonians.

MEDISTAR
HGO is delighted to count Medistar Corporation among its newest corporate supporters. Medistar is a full-service real estate development company that specializes in the design, development, financing, and construction of hospitals, long-term acute care facilities, cancer centers, integrated medical plazas, medical office buildings, and other medical facilities for the health care industry. The company is led by founder Monzer Hourani, an internationally renowned engineer whose innovations of many building techniques and concepts have had a great impact on the U.S. construction industry. Medistar joined the HGO family as a Grand Guarantor of the company’s production of Wagner’s Ring cycle (2014–17).
THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION

HGO is honored to be associated with The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, based in New York City. The Mellon Foundation’s opera program supports a small number of companies demonstrating a longstanding commitment to artistic innovation by developing and presenting ambitious new works or those rarely heard. This strategy is well aligned with a company like HGO, with a strong record of commissioning and producing innovative original work. Last season’s main-stage productions of Weinberg’s *The Passenger* and the world premiere of Ricky Ian Gordon and Leonard Foglia’s *A Coffin in Egypt* would not have been possible without the Mellon Foundation’s leadership investment. Upcoming Mellon Foundation–supported projects include the world premieres of this season’s holiday opera, *A Christmas Carol*, and *Prince of Players* (2015–16) by legendary American composer Carlisle Floyd, as well as *Our City*, the latest series of Houston-based chamber operas from HGOco.

MILLER THEATRE ADVISORY BOARD

The Miller Theatre Advisory Board (MTAB), appointed by Houston’s mayor and confirmed by the City Council, acts as a steward of public and private funds to provide professional-caliber performances free to the public at the Miller Outdoor Theatre for the cultural enrichment of Houston’s diverse communities and visitors to the city. HGO’s partnership with MTAB extends back nearly six decades, making great opera accessible to thousands of Houstonians each year through live main-stage and Opera to Go! performances at Miller Theatre. HGO is tremendously grateful to MTAB for providing the Opera’s second home for so many years, and looks forward to the bright future of this longstanding partnership. June Deadrick (left) is a new HGO trustee representing the Miller Theatre Advisory Board.

BRUCIE AND ANDY MOORE

Brucie and Andrew Moore have been a treasured part of the Opera family for more than twenty years. The couple resides in Goliad, Texas, where they own Rock On M Ranch, LLC. Subscribers since the 1998–99 season, Brucie and Andrew are members of HGO’s Founders Council for Artistic Excellence, supporting special events, general operations, and main-stage productions. HGO has had the honor of Brucie’s service on the HGO Board of Directors since 2013. In addition to her board participation, she is also a lifetime member of the board of governors of Leadership Corpus Christi, a board member of the Corpus Christi Symphony Orchestra, principal underwriter for the Corpus Christi Area Youth Orchestra, and board president of Harbor Playhouse, also in Corpus Christi. Andrew, an accomplished performer, was the 2012 winner of HGO’s Singing with the Houston Idols and recently performed in productions of *Les Misérables* and *Shrek the Musical*. Brucie and Andrew were recently honored by Harbor Playhouse as Philanthropists of the Year.

SARA AND BILL MORGAN

HGO subscribers for over fifteen years, Sara and Bill Morgan have been supporting HGO since 2002. Sara is no stranger to the Houston arts community—she 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. In addition to their support of HGO special events, the Morgans’ contributions to HGO’s main stage in recent years (Dead Man Walking, 2010–11; The Rape of Lucretia, 2011–12; and *The Passenger* at the Lincoln Center Festival, 2013–14) have helped the company to reach new heights. The couple will support HGO’s new holiday opera series with *It’s a Wonderful Life* in the 2016–17 season. HGO is thrilled to have Sara serve on its board of directors, and as a member and past chair of the HGOco Committee.
CYNTHIA AND ANTHONY PETRELLO
Cherished members of the HGO family, Cynthia and Anthony Petrello are deeply committed to improving the lives of Houstonians through their support of health care and the arts. Anthony is the chief executive officer of Nabors Industries, the world’s largest land-based drilling contractor. Cynthia, a community leader and HGO Board member since 2003, currently serves on the Opera’s Special Events and HGOco Committees, the latter of which she is chair. HGO is immeasurably grateful for the Petrellos’ support of the main stage, underwriting this season’s *A Christmas Carol*. The Petrellos also support HGOco programs for children, including the Student Performance Series and *Opera to Go!*

SCHLUMBERGER
Schlumberger, Ltd., is a leading corporate contributor to HGO, supporting the main stage and a wide range of special projects over nearly twenty 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 150,000 people. As the world’s leading supplier of technology, integrated project management, and information solutions to customers working in the oil and gas industry, Schlumberger is a global business, but the company also proactively engages with the local communities where its employees live and work. HGO is honored to count Schlumberger among its most dedicated corporate supporters, and thrilled to have Dan Domeracki, vice president of government and industry relations, serve on the HGO Board of Directors.

DIAN AND HARLAN STAI
In the twenty-six years since they first joined the Houston Grand Opera family, Dian and Harlan Stai have left no part of the company untouched by their warmth and generosity. 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 runs the gamut from main-stage productions to 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. Their support of HGO’s main stage includes *Tosca* (2009–10), *Lucia di Lammermoor* (2010–11), *Madame Butterfly* (2010–11), *La traviata* (2011–12), *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* (2012–13), and *A Coffin in Egypt* (2013–14). HGO was privileged to recognize Dian and Harlan as the honorees of Opening Night 2008 and the 2014 Concert of Arias.

JOHN G. TURNER & JERRY G. FISCHER
John Turner and Jerry Fischer, 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 shares a passion for Wagner that led them to support the *Ring* cycle (2014–17) with 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, in addition to serving on the boards of the American Friends of Covent Garden and the Pennington Biomedical Research Foundation. He is also chair of the HGO Studio Committee. Jerry is a board member of Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra. Prior to their instrumental contribution to HGO’s *Ring*, in recent years John and Jerry have supported HGO main-stage productions and special events. They are members of the Founders Council for Artistic Excellence, and John is a member of HGO’s Laureate Society.
**UNITED AIRLINES**

The official airline of Houston Grand Opera, United Airlines provides generous in-kind support for HGO artists to travel all over the world, as well as valuable airfare packages for HGO special event auctions. Last season, United organized a cross-marketing campaign with HGO to promote the *Ring* alongside the airline’s new nonstop route between Houston and Munich, Germany. With the world’s most comprehensive global route network, a strong commitment to the communities it serves, and a hub at Houston’s George Bush Intercontinental Airport, United is among the Opera’s top corporate sponsors. Jeff Smisek (left) is the CEO of United Airlines.

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**VINSON & ELKINS LLP**

HGO has been privileged to have the support of international law firm Vinson & Elkins for nearly three decades. Headquartered in Houston with approximately 700 lawyers in fifteen offices worldwide, V&E is 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 main-stage productions, including last season’s monumental *The Passenger*. The Opera is honored to have two V&E partners serve on its board of directors: Mark R. Spradling (general counsel and secretary, vice chair—Audit Committee) and Glen A. Rosenbaum (chairman emeritus).

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**MARGARET ALKEK WILLIAMS**

Margaret Alkek Williams, a jewel of the Houston community, has been a treasured friend of HGO for over thirty years. A longtime singer, she possesses a deep affinity for all music, and especially opera. Currently, Margaret continues her parents’ legacy as chairman of their foundation, where her son Charles A. Williams serves as president. HGO is humbled by Margaret’s incredible generosity and dedication to the company, both as an individual donor and through her family’s foundation. She has endowed the Margaret Alkek Williams Chair, held by HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers, and is a member of HGO’s Laureate Society. Recent main-stage productions Margaret has supported include *The Barber of Seville* (2011–12), *La bohème* (2012–13), *Show Boat* (2012–13), *Aida* (2013–14), and *Carmen* (2013–14). A valued member of the HGO Board of Directors, Margaret was the honoree of the 2009 Opera Ball and chairman of the 2014 Ball.

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**THE WORTHAM FOUNDATION, INC.**

The Wortham Foundation’s relationship with HGO dates back more than thirty years. In the 1980s, the 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 by serving on many civic, cultural, and philanthropic boards. Lyndall’s love for the arts and Gus’s involvement in city beautification and expansion have lived on through the philanthropic giving of the Wortham Foundation. The Foundation continues to support the Opera through the Wortham Foundation Permanent Endowment and generous annual operating support.
DAVID POWELL

HGO is thrilled that David Powell joined the board of directors earlier this year. David is head of global clients and investment banking for BBVA Compass in the United States. He manages U.S. and global clients, financial sponsors, institutional clients, and the Global Internal Networks team, which engages in the sales of investment banking products to smaller U.S. corporations that are clients of BBVA Compass's commercial line of business.

David has more than twenty-five years of experience in corporate and investment banking, most of which have been with BBVA Group. He joined the bank in 1992 in Mexico, where he was a member of the BBVA Bancomer Management Committee. At BBVA Bancomer, he held several director roles, including head of the corporate and investment banking, risk management, and corporate workout group. David began his banking career at the Irving Trust Company and then worked for the Union Bank of Switzerland, both based in New York.

David enjoys reading, writing, and especially traveling with his wife and family. After having lived in Mexico for twenty years, he also has a special interest in that country’s cultural, economic, and political landscape.
HGO is the only opera company to twice be invited to perform as part of the Lincoln Center Festival. This July, HGO presented Weinberg’s The Passenger with its enormous, multi-tiered set at the historic Park Avenue Armory. HGO patrons turned out en masse to support the project and take in other Lincoln Center Festival events and performances during the four-day trip.

Patrons Go The Distance

Photos by Stephanie Berger and Greg Robertson
Some of the opera world’s most sought-after talents got their start here at HGO. This year’s Patrons Circle Recital, hosted by Jackson and Company at The Corinthian, featured none other than HGO Studio alumna Jamie Barton. The winner of the 2013 Cardiff Singer of the World competition—fresh from her masterful role debut as Fricka in HGO’s Das Rheingold—wooed the star-struck crowd with a selection of her favorite songs, with pianist Patrick Harvey.
Scott Gaille is an attorney and executive whose career has ranged from giving oral argument before the United States Court of Appeals to acquiring petroleum concessions around the world. He has travelled to more than one hundred nations searching for international petroleum on behalf of Occidental Petroleum Corporation and other companies. Scott holds a Doctor of Law with High Honors from the University of Chicago and a Bachelor of Arts with High Honors from the University of Texas at Austin, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa. He is Founder and Managing Director of The Gaille Group and teaches at Rice University’s Graduate School of Business.

Based on Mr. Gaille’s course at Rice University’s Graduate School of Business, “the book on how energy companies grow by acquiring international concessions.”

-BISNOW Magazine

International Energy Development

Scott Gaille

International Energy Development

Scott Gaille

Based on Mr. Gaille’s course at Rice University’s Graduate School of Business, “the book on how energy companies grow by acquiring international concessions.”

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OPERA TO GO! VISITS BROOKWOOD

The citizens of Brookwood Community enthusiastically welcomed HGO to their campus on May 22 for the annual Opera to Go! performance made possible by the Guyla Pircher Harris Project. This year, Rapunzel was performed to the delight of all who attended, complete with a photo and autograph session after the performance.
CARMEN LOVES A PARTY

It was a star-studded affair and red was the color of the night as Jana and Scotty Arnoldy welcomed HGO patrons and the cast and creative team of Carmen into their home to celebrate the much-anticipated opening of this new, highly acclaimed production.

Chair: Terrylin G. Neale
Thursday, March 19, 2015
Wortham Theater Center

Join us for a special concert featuring international opera star Joyce DiDonato with Patrick Summers leading the HGO Orchestra and HGO Studio artists. The concert will be followed by an intimate on-stage dinner benefiting the Houston Grand Opera Endowment.

7:30 p.m. – Concert, Cullen Theater
Post-concert – Celebration dinner, Brown Theater

For tickets or information visit HGO.org or call Clare Greene at 713-546-0277

Please note gala dinner tickets include a ticket to the performance. Concert-only tickets may be purchased by visiting HGO.org.
Join the Laureate Society!
Incorporating 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, ensuring 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 rbuffet@hgo.org. Also visit HGO.org/LaureateSociety.

RING-SIZED CELEBRATION

The eyes of the opera world were on Texas as HGO opened Das Rheingold, the first installment of its four-season Ring cycle. Following the show, lead sponsors John G. Turner and Jerry G. Fischer pulled out all the stops for a celebration at the historic Sam Houston Hotel’s rooftop veranda—complete with a vast spread of Texas cuisine and a polka band.
HGO STUDIO COMES TO CORPUS CRISTI

HGO Board member Brucie Moore, her husband, Andy, and patron Louise Chapman hosted an HGO Studio recital May 22 at the Corpus Christi Country Club to encourage their hometown arts lovers to support HGO. Attendees included HGO subscribers and donors from Corpus Christi and San Antonio, local symphony supporters, and friends.

Donors enjoy exclusive benefits that enhance their experience at the opera. To donate or for more information, visit HGO.org or contact Rebecca Kier at 713-546-0252 or rkier@hgo.org.
I really appreciate all the Guild does for artists coming to Houston. It’s a group of volunteers who work to make artists feel welcome.”

Ana María Martinez, Soprano, HGO Studio Alum

Please join us on Saturday, September 27, at the Omni Houston Hotel when the HGO Guild kicks off the opera season by honoring those who have made outstanding contributions of support to the organization.

In operatic story lines, Gifts From the Heart often play key roles. In Verdi’s Otello, Desdemona receives a handkerchief from Otello as a sign of his affection. In Mozart’s Così fan tutte, Ferrando expresses his love by giving a locket to Dorabella.

Like these imagined characters, the men and women whom we honor this year express their feelings by sharing Gifts From the Heart of their time, effort, and financial support.

Bonnie Sue Wooldridge Volunteer of the Year Awards will be presented to Kirk Hickey and Janet Upole for their many years of service coordinating the HGO Guild Spring Event silent auction.

Perryn Leech, HGO managing director, will receive the Bravo Award for professional excellence.

Volunteer of Distinction Awards will be presented to Fred Gott, Steve Homer, Deirdre McDowell, and Ro and Bob Rea.

This year’s Rising Stars are Gwyneth Campbell, Quentin Thigpen, and Daisy Yu.

Merry Schooley, founder and owner of Art Attack, will receive the Crescendo Award.

Join us for a beautiful tribute to our honorees and a fun start to HGO’s 60th Anniversary season.

Purchase tickets at www.hgoguild.org.

Questions? Contact the chair of the Awards Lunch, Kathy Moore, at 281-379-3766 or kemoore76@sbcglobal.net
Patrons Society

Members of Houston Grand Opera’s Patrons Society support the opera at a level of $4,000 or more, thereby making possible the incredible work of HGO. Members of the Society are entitled to many benefits at the opera, including complimentary valet parking, Masterson Green Room privileges during performance intermissions, personalized ticket service, two tickets to all open dress rehearsals, Opera Guild membership, a discount on Opera Guild Boutique purchases, and more. HGO gratefully recognizes our Patrons Society members. For information on joining the Patrons Society, please call Deborah Hirsch at 713-546-0259.

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The Laureate Society comprises individuals who have helped ensure the future of Houston Grand Opera by remembering the Opera in their wills, retirement plans, trusts, or other types of estate plans. The Laureate Society does not require a minimum amount to become a member. Planned estate gifts to the Houston Grand Opera Endowment can be used to support general or specific Opera programs. Houston Grand Opera is deeply grateful to these individuals. Their generosity and foresight enable the Opera to maintain its growth and stability, thus enriching the lives of future generations.

We Honor the Memory of Those Who Included HGO in Their Estate Plans:

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- Miss Bonnie Sue Wooldridge

For information regarding charitable estate gift planning and how it might positively impact you, your loved ones, and Houston Grand Opera, please contact Richard Buffett, director of major gifts and legacy giving, at 713-546-0216 or visit HGO.org/laureatesociety.
The Houston Grand Opera Endowment, Inc., is a separate nonprofit organization that invests contributions to earn income for the benefit of Houston Grand Opera Association. The Endowment Board works with Paul Comstock Partners, independent investment counsel, to engage professional investment managers.

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An endowed fund can be permanently established within the Houston Grand Opera Endowment through a direct contribution or via a planned gift such as a bequest. The fund can be designated for general purposes or specific interests. For a discussion on endowing a fund, please contact Richard Buffett, Director of Major Gifts and Legacy Giving, at 713-546-0216. HGO acknowledges with deep gratitude the following endowed funds:

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### SEPTEMBER

16
- Studio Showcase. The singers and pianists of HGO’s internationally acclaimed young artist training program present a fully staged program of opera scenes in the Wortham Theater Center’s Cullen Theater, 8 p.m. Free to all subscribers.

19 & 20
- HGOco presents David Hanlon and Joann Farias’s Past the Checkpoints in concert. Talento Bilingüe de Houston, 333 S. Jensen Drive, September 19 at 7 p.m.; September 20 at 4 p.m. Join us for a community conversation after the September 20 performance.

25 & 26
- HGOco presents Otello. For more information, contact Scott Ipsen at 713-546-0242 or sipsen@hgo.org.

### OCTOBER

5
- Laureate Society Recital at the Wynden, 1025 S. Post Oak Ln., 3:30 p.m. For more information, contact Richard Buffet at 713-546-0216 or rbuffet@hgo.org.

21
- HGOco presents a professional development workshop for teachers on Otello. Wortham Theater Center, 6 p.m.

24, 26m, NOV. 1, 4, 7
- Performances of Verdi’s Otello. Wortham Theater Center’s Brown Theater. Special intermission reception for members of Opening Nights for Young Professionals at the October 24 performance only.

24
- HGO’s Opening Night Dinner Celebration following the performance of Otello. Wortham Theater Center, Ray C. Fish Plaza. For more information, contact Scott Ipsen at 713-546-0242 or sipsen@hgo.org.

### NOVEMBER

2

31, NOV. 2m, 8, 13, 15
- Performances of Mozart’s Così fan tutte. Wortham Theater Center’s Brown Theater. Special intermission reception for members of Opening Nights for Young Professionals at the October 31 performance only.

### DECEMBER

6, 7
- HGO Studio Recital at Rienzi. Hear HGO Studio artists in the intimate and elegant salon at Rienzi. MFAH’s decorative arts wing, 1406 Kirby Drive. December 6 at 7:30 p.m., December 7 at 5 p.m. Call 713-639-7800 for information.

5, 7m, 9, 11, 14m, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21m
- World premiere performances of Iain Bell and Simon Callow’s A Christmas Carol. Wortham Theater Center’s Cullen Theater. Special intermission reception for members of Opening Night for Young Professionals in the December 5 performance only.

### JANUARY

23, 25m, 28, 31, FEB. 6, 8m
- Performances of Puccini’s Madame Butterfly. Wortham Theater Center’s Brown Theater. Special intermission reception for members of Opening Night for Young Professionals in the January 23 performance only.

### FEBRUARY

1

5
- Concert of Arias—27th Annual Eleanor McColllum Competition for Young Singers. Cullen Theater, Wortham Theater Center. The evening begins with a 6 p.m. champagne reception, followed by the competition at 7 p.m. Celebration Dinner to follow in the Grand Foyer. For information, contact Scott Ipsen at 713-546-0242 or sipsen@hgo.org.

10 & 13
- HGOco presents Student Matinee Performances of The Magic Flute, 10 a.m. For school groups only.

11
- HGOco presents High School Night performance of The Magic Flute, 7 p.m. For school groups only.

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For information on all Houston Grand Opera events, call the Customer Care Center at 713-228-OPERA (6737) or 800-62-OPERA (800-626-7372) unless otherwise noted. For information on HGOco events, please call 713-546-0230, email HGOco@HGO.org, or visit HGO.org/HGOco.
MARCH

13 & 14
- HGO Studio Recital at Rienzi. Hear HGO Studio artists in the intimate and elegant salon at Rienzi, MFAH’s decorative arts wing, 1406 Kirby Drive, 7:30 p.m. Call 713-639-7800 for information.

19
- HGO 60th Anniversary Gala, featuring mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato. Wortham Theater Center, 7:30 p.m. For information, contact contact Scott Ipsen at 713-546-0242 or sipsen@hgo.org.

APRIL

11
- Opera Ball 2014. Grand Foyer of the Wortham Theater Center, 7 p.m. Followed by the Encore Party. For information, contact Scott Ipsen at 713-546-0242 or sipsen@hgo.org.

15
- HGOco presents a professional development workshop for teachers on Die Walküre. Wortham Theater Center, 5:30 p.m. (please note early start).

MAY

18, 22, 25, 30, MAY 3m
- Performances of Wagner’s Die Walküre. Wortham Theater Center’s Brown Theater. Special intermission reception for members of Opening Night for Young Professionals in the April 18 performance only.

24, 26m, 29, MAY 2, 8, 9
- Performances of Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler’s Sweeney Todd. Wortham Theater Center’s Brown Theater. Special intermission reception for members of Opening Night for Young Professionals in the April 24 performance only.

26
- Behind the Music: An intimate conversation about Sweeney Todd immediately following the performance. Masterson Green Room. Free.

JUNE

2

8–12
- HGOco’s Opera Experience camp at Wortham Theater Center. Visit HGO.org/HGOco for more information.

15–19
- HGOco’s Create an Opera camp at Wortham Theater Center. Visit HGO.org/HGOco for more information.

15–26
- HGOco’s Art of Opera camp at Wortham Theater Center. Visit HGO.org/HGOco for more information.

2014–15 HGO BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

OCTOBER 2, 2014
9 A.M.–NOON

DECEMBER 4, 2014
9 A.M.–NOON

MARCH 5, 2015
4–7 P.M.

MAY 21, 2015
9 A.M.–NOON

Board meetings will be held at the Wortham Theater Center.

2014–15 HGO TRUSTEES MEETINGS

SEPTEMBER 11, 2014

JANUARY 29, 2015

Trustees meetings will be held from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Wortham Theater Center.
Houston Grand Opera Management and Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title and Role</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Artistic and Music Director*</td>
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<td>Margaret Alkek Williams Chair</td>
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<td>GREGORY S. ROBERTSON</td>
<td>Chief Advancement Officer</td>
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<td>SANDRA BERNHARD</td>
<td>Director of HGoco</td>
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<td>LAURA CANNING</td>
<td>Director of HGO Studio</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOLLY DILL</td>
<td>General Manager *</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAVID FEHELEY</td>
<td>Technical and Production Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>MENA MARK HANNA</td>
<td>Assistant Artistic Director</td>
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<td>DEBORAH HIRSCH</td>
<td>Senior Director of Development</td>
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<td>JUDITH KURNICK</td>
<td>Director of Communications</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRADLEY MOORE</td>
<td>Head of Music Staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Music Director, HGO Studio</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIANE ZOLA</td>
<td>Director of Artistic Administration *</td>
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* denotes 10 or more years of service
Houston Grand Opera offers a wealth of services to enhance your opera experience.

Want to brush up on the opera before you attend? Need directions to the theater? This information and much more is available on our website where you can also purchase tickets and make a donation:

www.houstongrandopera.org

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-OPERA (6737) or 800-62-OPERA (800-626-7372). You can also e-mail customercare@houstongrandopera.org. Throughout the season, the Center will be staffed Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. (or until curtain time on performance days). 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.

**BROWN AND CULLEN ALCOVES**

The Wortham Theater Center’s newly renovated 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 Opera-to-Order 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 24 hours before the performance begins; for exchanges within 24 hours of curtain time, please visit the Box Office in person. 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. More than 24 hours prior to the performance: call the Customer Care Center at 713-228-OPERA (6737) or 800-62-OPERA (800-626-7372) to request replacement tickets. They will be reprinted and held at the Will Call window for your performance. Within 24 hours of the performance: go to the Box Office Manager’s window. The Box Office Manager will access your account and reprint your tickets free of charge.

**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-OPERA (6737) or 800-62-OPERA (800-626-7372) for full details.

**FOOD AND BEVERAGE SERVICES**

To pre-order food and beverages at the Grand Foyer Café prior to the performance, call Aramark at 713-250-3650. Pre-order beverages for intermission at any of the lobby bars when you arrive at the theater. When you return at intermission, your beverages will be waiting for you.

Full-season subscribers in the Founders Boxes, Premium Orchestra, and Loge Boxes may dine in the Founders Salon. Reservations are required, and meals must be ordered in advance. To take advantage of this subscriber-only benefit, call Elegant Events and Catering by Michael at 713-533-9318.

**PARKING**

Valet parking is a benefit of membership for Patrons Circle and National Patron 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@houstongrandopera.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 $7.00 on weekends and after 5 p.m. on weekdays. Clearance for trucks and vans is 6’8”. The tunnel connecting the garage to the Wortham Theater Center is on the orange level of the garage.

The recommended entrances for the Theater District Garage are on Prairie or Texas between Bagby and Smith. The recommended entrances for the Alley Theatre Garage are on Smith or Louisiana between Texas and Prairie.

**DIRECTIONS**

**VIA I-10**

Traveling East  
Smith exit  
RIGHT on Prairie Street  
LEFT into Theater District garage, entrance #8

Traveling West  
San Jacinto/Main exit  
LEFT on San Jacinto Street  
RIGHT on Prairie Street  
LEFT into Theater District garage, entrance #8

**VIA US-59**

Traveling North  
Take Louisiana/Brazos exit; follow Louisiana Street  
LEFT on Prairie Street  
LEFT into Theater District Garage, entrance #8

Traveling South  
Take I-10 West to the San Jacinto/Main exit (see I-10 directions)

**VIA 290**  
Loop 610 South to I-10 East  
(see I-10 directions)

**VIA I-45**

Traveling North  
Houston Avenue/Memorial Drive exit  
RIGHT on Memorial Drive feeder; cross Bagby Street  
LEFT into Theater District garage, entrance #1

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**Traveling South**

Take the I-10 split (to Beaumont), bear LEFT; Exit Milam Street  
RIGHT on Prairie Street  
LEFT into Theater District garage, entrance #8

**VIA 225**  
Loop 610 West to I-45 North  
(see I-45 directions)

**VIA MEMORIAL DRIVE**

Memorial turns into Texas Avenue  
LEFT into Theater District garage, entrance #6

**VIA ALLEN PARKWAY**

Parkway turns into Dallas Street  
LEFT on Bagby Street  
RIGHT on Rusk Street  
LEFT into Theater District garage, entrance #1

**VIA 288**

Take I-45 North (see I-45 directions)

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**OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

Out of consideration for other patrons and for the performers, late arrivals will be seated at intermission.

Children aged five years and older who are capable of sitting quietly through a minimum of three hours are welcome at HGO performances when accompanied by an adult. Should a child become restless, our ushers will direct adult and child to an area where they may watch the performance together on closed-circuit television until the child is able to be calm and quiet. Adult and child will be welcome to resume their seats at the next intermission.

Out of consideration for other patrons and for the performers, anyone of any age whose behavior is noisy or disruptive may be asked to leave the performance by house management or HGO staff.

Cameras, recording devices, cellular telephones, pagers, beeping watches, and recording devices may not be used during the performance inside the hall. Cameras and recording devices may be confiscated by an usher or HGO staff member.

Complimentary cough suppressants are available at Houston Grand Opera performances. Visit the Customer Care booth in the Grand Foyer.

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Food and beverages are allowed in the lobby area only. Bottled water may be taken into the theater.

Smoking is prohibited in the Wortham Theater Center.

For your safety inside the auditorium, please remain seated until the house lights are turned on.

In case of illness during a performance, ask an usher to contact the EMT on call.

**EMERGENCY NUMBERS**

Backstage Security at the Wortham Theater Center: 713-250-3857

Wortham Theater Center lost-and-found: 713-237-1439
How did growing up in New Zealand influence your development as an artist? New Zealand, although relatively small in population, has produced a high number of international opera singers—in particular, Sir Donald McIntyre and Dame Kiri Te Kanawa. Growing up on the South Island offered me many opportunities in music making—I studied piano and organ and immersed myself in the brass band long before I started singing. This was also accompanied by rugby, cricket, and basketball. I guess the country air worked well on my developing vocal cords—just like Texas!

What’s the best part about being a heldentenor (heroic tenor)?

The music, music... the music. Both Verdian and Wagnerian tenorial heroes are often blessed with the greatest music in all opera. Secondly, the roles demand that we engage in very passionate moments with our Walsungen sister Sieglinde, Brünnhilde, Kundry in Parsifal and of course Desdemona in Otello. Who wouldn’t love that!

We haven’t done Otello in a very long time, partly because it’s such an exceedingly difficult role to sing and therefore equally hard to cast. Why is it so difficult?

The role of Otello demands a singer with a certain power coupled with a large range. I absolutely love performing the role as it challenges me to the highest level throughout the opera. Otello has the greatest opening lines in all opera, the “Esultate!” They must be sung with immense celebration, power, and passion. Once this is over, one can relax for a few minutes; then the role reignites with the most wonderful love duet to close the act. The rest of the role is a high-stakes balance in use of one’s vocal resources, passion, and energy.

Plácido Domingo was our last Otello, and I understand he mentored you in the role.

Maestro Domingo is my idol. He is the reason I got my break at the Metropolitan Opera some ten years ago. I was very fortunate to be his cover as Siegmund for Die Walküré—the role of Otello proved to be a fantastic break from the Teutonic German hero. I have studied Domingo at length and hope that I have been able to incorporate some of his incredible detail in the role of Otello.

I have just completed my first staged run of Otello with Opera Australia in Sydney with a cast, crew, and conductor who all have contributed to my preparation for the Houston performances. I have been preparing the role for many years in the studio but one cannot underestimate on-stage job training!

Siegmund, unlike Otello, is a role you have sung a lot—what have you learned about Siegmund that you didn’t know the first time you performed the role?

My career has had this role at its core for a decade now and it has taken me to every great opera house in the world. Last season alone, I was fortunate to perform the role at Covent Garden, the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, and the Vienna, Munich, and Berlin State operas—each time finding something new with the role.

Tell me about your family.

My wife, Carmel [a partner in a major London law firm], and I have always supported each other in our careers. We now have three gorgeous children to share our lives with—Grace, Tom, and Violet. Both Carmel and I look on our careers with pride, but nothing compares to these three little monkeys. The children love music and particularly enjoy seeing their dad getting his makeup applied around the world via Skype and FaceTime.

My twins [Grace and Tom] had their first birthday in Houston while we were producing Lohengrin; they went on to attend kindergarten adjacent to the Bayreuth Festival House where I performed Parsifal, and have been on stage at Covent Garden with both Wotan and Brünnhilde prior to the Ring performances in which I performed Siegmund with the great Bryn Terfel and Susan Bullock. They are now in school, loving it, and thriving.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Being in the same hemisphere with my wife and kids after a long time apart singing my way around the planet.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

My three children—that is it!
What should a person look for in a private banker?
Sincerity and relentlessness. There is a saying about sincerity: “They won’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” You can look for creativity, knowledge, responsiveness, and access—and those are all good things—but at the end of the day, the care you receive and relentless work toward helping you achieve your financial goals are what really count.

What piece of advice would you give people today in managing their financial future?
Many people think they may have missed the boat on making a financial plan for the future. Just like it is never too late to plant a tree, it is NEVER too late to secure your future by sitting down with experts to map out what you can accomplish.

What is something people may not know about you?
I was a drummer in the Aggie Band. In fact, I worked my way through college playing in all types of bands. Music requires a certain amount of precision while still allowing creativity. I’d like to think that’s carried over in my banking life.
Metamorphosis, an Hermès story