



HoustonGrandOpera

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PRESS RELEASE

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Statement from HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers and Managing Director Perryn Leech regarding cultural casting questions in opera

HGO welcomes discussion of how the 400-year-old art of opera can adapt to reflect today's cultural concerns. Opera companies across the country are actively working to engage with these issues and to reflect the diversity of our communities. Ten years ago, HGO began working with Houston's minority communities to develop operas that celebrated Houston as a meeting place for Eastern and Western cultures, exploring stories heard from immigrant communities of China, Azerbaijan, Iran, Cambodia, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and India. The company received the Leading Lights Diversity Award from the National Multicultural Institute for that work and became a model for opera community engagement across the nation. In 2010, HGO presented the world premiere of the first mariachi opera, *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*, followed by a second, *El Pasado Nunca se Termina*, in 2015.

Opera is, of course, primarily a vocal art, and HGO casts performers on the basis of talent, not ethnicity. That is why the company did not hesitate to cast two African-American singers as Adina and Belcore in *The Elixir of Love* earlier this season or a Chinese singer as Dr. Bartolo in *The Marriage of Figaro* last season, among many other examples. HGO staff travel around the world to identify extraordinary young talent for our Concert of Arias vocal competition and our young artists training program, the HGO Studio. Through these programs, HGO has enlarged the pool of minority artists who are prepared for international careers at the highest levels and has actively promoted the careers of many gifted young performers of various races and ethnicities. Korean soprano Pureum Jo, one of the principal singers in Bright Sheng and David Henry Hwang's new opera, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, is a 2016 graduate of the HGO Studio.

We recognize that we can do more to engage community leaders in discussing the work of adapting and evolving opera for our time. We have already begun conversations to address cultural stereotypes in Mozart's *The Abduction*

from the Seraglio, which we will present later this season, and look forward to expanding the dialogue.

By uniting powerful stories with music and especially with exquisite voices, opera can profoundly penetrate our inner world. That is why the art form continues to speak to audiences across centuries. HGO is dedicated to sharing opera's beauty, meaning, and humanity with all Houstonians even as we acknowledge that there is room for change.

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About Houston Grand Opera

Since its inception in 1955, Houston Grand Opera has grown from a small regional organization into an internationally renowned opera company. HGO enjoys a reputation for commissioning and producing new works, including 63 world premieres and seven American premieres since 1973. In addition to producing and performing world-class opera, HGO contributes to the cultural enrichment of Houston and the nation through a diverse and innovative program of performances, community events, and education projects that reaches the widest possible public. HGO has toured extensively, including trips to Europe and Asia, and has won a Tony, two Grammy awards, and two Emmy awards—the only opera company to have won all three honors.

Through HGOco, Houston Grand Opera creates opportunities for Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to create, participate in, and observe art. The NEXUS Initiative is HGO's multi-year ticket underwriting program that allows Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to enjoy world-class opera without the barrier of price. Since 2007 NEXUS has enabled more than 225,000 Houstonians to experience first-quality opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

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