

Houston Grand Opera Announces Triumphant Return to Live Performances at the Wortham Theater Center for the 2021-22 Season

After an all-virtual 2020-21 season through HGO Digital, the company will present six highly anticipated productions live at The Wortham Theater Center

*The upcoming season presents the HGO revival of the beloved **Carmen**, the exciting world premiere of **The Snowy Day**, a reimagined **The Magic Flute**, the gripping drama **Dialogues of the Carmelites**, and new productions of **Turandot** and **Romeo and Juliet***

*Following its successful inaugural season, **HGO Digital** returns for 2021-22 to complement the company's mainstage season*

Houston—May 6, 2021—Houston Grand Opera (HGO) will present its 2021-22 season live and in person after a year of reimagining the artform in a virtual format through the 2020-21 HGO Digital season. In March 2020, the company made the necessary but difficult decision to cancel the remainder of the 2019-20 mainstage season, and shortly thereafter also had to cancel the entire 2020-21 mainstage season, due to the worldwide pandemic. On October 22, 2021, the company will celebrate its triumphant return to performing live opera on the mainstage with fan favorite *Carmen*.

“HGO has once again demonstrated its resiliency and its commitment to this treasured artform over the past year. To say I am proud of every member of the HGO team would be an understatement—they all continue to blow me away with their creativity and tenacity,” says **HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers**. “Seeking out creative alternative means of artistic expression since the pandemic’s onset has been both challenging and incredibly rewarding. We are excited to carry our new expertise forward into the future. But we are thrilled beyond measure to join our beloved audience for a new season of opera. Nothing stirs the soul like being in the theater for a live opera performance—nothing.”

The 67th season opens with audience favorite *Carmen*. Canadian mezzo-soprano and HGO Studio alumna **Carolyn Sproule** takes on the title role in the revival of **Rob Ashford’s** acclaimed 2014 production of Bizet’s classic. She is joined by tenor **Richard Trey Smagur** as Don José and soprano **Heidi Stober** as Micaela, both HGO Studio alumni. Rounding out the cast is bass-baritone **Christian Pursell** as Escamillo, making his HGO debut. The production will be conducted by **Lidiya Yankovskaya**, also in her HGO debut.

The company’s 71st world premiere continues HGO’s holiday opera series with composer **Joel Thompson** and librettist **Andrea Davis Pinkney’s** *The Snowy Day*, based on the beloved children’s picture book by **Ezra Jack Keats**. Jumping off the pages and onto the stage, the opera was originally slotted for the 2020-21 season. Instead, as part of the HGO Digital 2020-21 season, the company presented a documentary on the new work, *The Making of The Snowy Day: An Opera for All*. For the family-friendly opera’s highly anticipated December 2021 world premiere, HGO Studio artist and soprano **Raven McMillon** performs the role of Peter, and director **Omer Ben Seadia**, in her HGO mainstage directorial debut, brings the wonder and magic of a young boy’s wintry world to life. HGO’s Patrick Summers conducts.

The company's winter repertoire features the powerful tragedy *Dialogues of the Carmelites* and a reimagined Mozart classic, *The Magic Flute*. The gripping drama of Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites* showcases the talents of some of the most sought-after artists in opera. Sopranos and HGO Studio alumnae **Natalya Romaniw** and **Lauren Snouffer** join the cast as Blanche and Sister Constance, respectively. They are joined by the dramatic soprano **Christine Goerke** as Madame Lidoine, last seen at HGO in her superb performance as the title character in *Elektra* (2018). Dubbed one of the finest sopranos of her generation, **Anna Caterina Antonacci** sings the role of Madame Croissy in her HGO debut. Legendary director **Francesca Zambello** returns to HGO, and Patrick Summers conducts. **Barrie Kosky** and **Suzanne Andrade**'s wildly inventive production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, originally scheduled for the 2019-20 season, rounds out the winter repertoire. This silent-film-inspired visual spectacle incorporates live performance with a magical animated world created by artist and illustrator **Paul Barritt**. **Dame Jane Glover** conducts this Mozart masterpiece. HGO Studio alumni make up much of the cast, including tenor **Norman Reinhardt** as Tamino, soprano **Andrea Carroll** as Pamina, bass **Anthony Robin Schneider** as Sarastro, and baritone **Thomas Glass** as Papageno. Soprano **Rainelle Krause** makes her HGO debut as the Queen of the Night.

Closing the 2021-22 season is HGO's spring repertoire, *Turandot* and *Romeo and Juliet*. The mesmerizing new production of *Turandot* was created by world-renowned artist and Texan **Robert Wilson**. Opera powerhouse and HGO Studio alumna **Tamara Wilson** performs the title role, returning to the HGO mainstage after her acclaimed performance in the title role of *Aida* (2020). Celebrated tenor **Kristian Benedikt** makes his company debut as Calaf. After taking center stage during the 2020-21 HGO Digital season (*Vinkensport*, *The Impresario*, *Giving Voice*, and a recital for the Live from The Cullen series), Houstonian and beloved soprano **Nicole Heaston** returns to the Brown stage as Liù. HGO Principal Guest Conductor **Eun Sun Kim**, who conducted *The Impresario* for HGO Digital in fall 2020, takes the podium. Finally, director **Tomer Zvulun**, last seen at HGO as director of *Rigoletto* (2019), brings a new production of Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* to Houston. Tenor **Michael Spyres**, previously seen with HGO for one critically acclaimed performance subbing for Lawrence Brownlee as Fernand in *La favorite* in winter 2020, plays Romeo opposite soprano **Adriana Gonzalez** in her HGO debut as Juliet. Italian conductor **Speranza Scappucci** also makes her company debut with this production.

Of note, four of HGO's six mainstage operas for 2021-22 will be conducted by women, more than any other season in company history, and the other two will be directed by women.

HGO will host learning panels and discussions to complement each of the operas in the 2021-22 season. This programming will enhance the audience experience, providing history and context for each work while showcasing the extraordinary talents of the artists and creatives behind each production. More information about this additional content will be announced later this summer.

"We know that people who love opera have a tremendous appetite for the artform," says **HGO Chief Advancement Officer Gregory S. Robertson**. "And so HGO is offering its wonderful patrons and subscribers a host of ways to learn about opera and interact with the amazing people who create it, all in addition to the world-class works we'll be presenting on the mainstage. There is truly nothing else in this entire region that compares to the experience that HGO provides to its audiences and supporters."

Because the inaugural season of HGO Digital, which replaced the company's 2020-21 mainstage performances, received an enthusiastic reception, the company is bringing back HGO Digital for 2021-22. Like companies around the world, HGO re-envisioned how to create and present operatic works in



the digital space during the pandemic, allowing it to reach audiences in its region and across the globe. The company will announce a new slate of digital offerings for the upcoming season at a later date.

“This past year we have truly pushed the artform, and the way we consume it, forward. We believe that streaming is here to stay,” explains **HGO Acting Chief Operating Officer Molly Dill**. “It’s a way to reach new audiences and hopefully to entice them to experience great opera live in our home in the Wortham Theater Center. It’s also a way of expanding beyond geographic and economic barriers. We have a much broader reach with our digital offerings; it allows new audiences to try something they may not have experienced yet, and provides an opportunity for all audiences to engage with the art of opera in a new way. We look forward to announcing our digital offerings later this year.”

Subscriptions to the 2021-22 season are available at [HGO.org](https://www.hgo.org). Single tickets will be available later this summer. Those who previously subscribed to the 2020-21 season will have their orders moved to the 2021-22 season and receive more information regarding their seats.

HGO anticipates new COVID protocols will be in place for the opening of the 2021-22 season. The safety of staff, cast, technicians, and audiences remains HGO’s first consideration while planning the upcoming season. New procedures could include temperature checks before entering the building; a mask requirement throughout the building, including in seats; social distancing; and increased hand sanitation stations. While the organization hopes to return to normalcy by the holidays, HGO leadership will continue to assess the situation while following recommendations from the HGO Health Committee, whose members include experts from the company’s partners at Houston Methodist. For more information about the procedures in place, visit [HGO.org/Safety](https://www.hgo.org/Safety).

This fall, HGO will forgo in-person gatherings for both their young professional group, Opening Night for Young Professionals (ONYP), and LBGTQIA+ group, Overture. HGO hopes to resume intermission mixers for the winter season. More information about these groups will be announced at a later date.

Dill continues, “Safety will remain at the center of every decision we make this year. We are very eager to get back to live performances but will only move forward by carefully following all protocols set by our HGO Health Advisory Committee comprised of healthcare professionals including our partners from Houston Methodist.”

HGO is excited to announce Christine Goerke as this season’s Lynn Wyatt Great Artist recipient. The Lynn Wyatt Great Artist Fund, an endowed fund dedicated to bringing the world’s best artists to HGO, was established in 2010 by Oscar Wyatt in honor of Lynn Wyatt’s many years of philanthropy and service to the company. Past recipients include Ana María Martínez, Eun Sun Kim, John Caird, Anthony Roth Costanzo, Jane Glover, and Joyce DiDonato.

Four mainstage productions from HGO’s upcoming season—*Carmen*, *The Snowy Day*, *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, and *Turandot*—are part of *Seeking the Human Spirit*, a six-year multidisciplinary initiative designed to highlight the universal spiritual themes raised in opera and to expand and deepen Houstonians’ connections to opera and to art. This season’s theme is “**character**.” The initiative is committed to creating programs and events that supply context to the operas by enhancing and enriching the community’s experience of each year’s theme. Lectures, discussions, performances, and interactive workshops will be open to the public throughout the season in partnership with a variety of Houston organizations including Houston Coalition Against Hate, Rothko Chapel, Asia Society Texas Center, Buffalo Bayou Partnership, Jewish Community Center, Emancipation Park Conservancy, and



many more. Information about the 2021-22 collaborations will be announced later this year, and details can be found at HGO.org/STHS.

HGOco is Houston Grand Opera's celebrated initiative connecting the company to the community with over 320 creative, civic, and learning events reaching 80,000 Houstonians annually. HGOco commissions new chamber works that tell stories relevant to Houston or highlight important educational themes.

In February 2022, HGOco will present HGO's 72nd world premiere, *Turn and Burn, A Rodeo Opera*, in tandem with rodeo season. Part of the Song of Houston initiative, the 75-minute chamber opera is composed by **Nell Shaw Cohen** to a libretto by **Megan Cohen** and conducted by **Benjamin Manis**. The production will be directed by **Leslie Swackhamer**. The story, created from interviews with rodeo athletes through generous access courtesy of the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo, centers on a small-town barrel-racing champion and an ambitious young executive who aim for a big win at the rodeo. Set in a colorful world of bucking broncs and carnival rides, the premiere offers a feminist perspective on contemporary rodeo culture.

This fall, HGOco will offer a virtual release of *The Barber of Seville in Texas*, this season's Opera To Go! production. In a bilingual adaptation of Rossini's beloved comic opera, language divides a young couple as much as a stubborn uncle. Opera's most famous barber, Figaro, plays the role of translator as Rossini's sparkling, witty score takes center stage. This production is sung in English and Spanish, and will begin touring in Spring 2022.

In March 2021, HGO announced the [incoming class of HGO Studio members](#). Next season the HGO Studio will resume the tradition of hosting its intimate annual recitals for supporters, during which the exceptional talents of this season's up-and-coming artists will be showcased. More information can be found at HGO.org/Studio.

HGO's mainstage season will comprise 36 performances of six productions and three community performances. The company will also present three student performances. Subscriptions to the 2021-22 season are now available at HGO.org. Single tickets will be available later this summer. Additional details of the upcoming HGO productions are provided below, and more information is available at the company's website: HGO.org. All repertoire, dates, pricing, productions, and casting are subject to change without notice.

About Houston Grand Opera

Houston Grand Opera (HGO) is one of the largest, most innovative, and most highly acclaimed opera companies in the United States. HGO was the only American finalist for Opera Company of the Year in the 2019 International Opera Awards, and the only American company to be nominated twice. In fulfilling its mission to advance the operatic art, to serve the Houston community, and to be a global leader in the future of opera, HGO has led the field in commissioning new works (70 world premieres to date) and in training and nurturing promising young artists and administrators. The company contributes to the cultural enrichment of Houston and the nation through a diverse and innovative program of performances, community events, and education projects that reaches the widest possible public. HGO's pioneering community engagement initiative, HGOco, has served as a model for other arts organizations.

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



250,000 Houstonians to experience superlative opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

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

Media Contact: Abby Linney, Elmore PR, 713-524-0661; abby@elmorepr.com

Media Contact: Natalie Barron, Houston Grand Opera, 713-546-0240; nbarron@hgo.org

Director of Marketing and Communications: Dale Edwards, 713-546-0249

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Houston Grand Opera: 2021-22 Season

- * Company debut
- ** HGO Studio artist
- # Former HGO Studio artist
- † Alternate cast

Bizet: *Carmen*

October 22, 24m, 26 (High School Night), 28, 30, November 3, 5, 6, 7m, 2021
Sung in French with projected English translations

CAST

Carmen: Carolyn Sproule # / Sarah Mesko (October 26 and November 6)
Don José: Richard Trey Smagur # / Scott Quinn # (October 26 and November 6)
Escamillo: Christian Pursell *
Micaela: Heidi Stober #
Zuniga: William Guanbo Su **
El Dancairo: Luke Sutliff **
El Remendado: Ricardo Garcia **
Morales: Blake Denson #

Frasquita: Raven McMillon**
Mercedes: Sun-Ly Pierce **

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Lidiya Yankovskaya * / Benjamin Manis (October 26 and November 6)
Director / Choreographer: Rob Ashford
Set Designer: David Rockwell
Original Costume Designer: Julie Weiss
Lighting Designer: Donald Holder
Chorus Master: Richard Bado, *Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair #*

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra, Chorus, and Children's Chorus

A revival co-production with Lyric Opera Chicago

GRAND UNDERWRITER

ConocoPhillips

**Joel Thompson | Andrea Davis Pinkney: *The Snowy Day*
World Premiere**

Based on the children's picture book by Ezra Jack Keats
Performance Dates: December 9, 10, 11, 12m, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19m, 2021
Sung in English with projected English translations

CAST

Peter: Raven McMillon ** / Flora Wall* (December [15m and] 16)
Amy / Ensemble: Elena Villalón ** / Maria Valdes (December [15m and] 16)
Mama / Ensemble: Karen Slack / Arianna Longino * (December [15m and] 16)
Daddy / Tim / Ensemble: Nicholas Newton # / Blake Denson ** (December [15m and] 16)
Papi / Jasper / Ensemble: Andres Acosta / Ricardo Garcia ** (December [15m and] 16)
Billy / Ensemble: Cory McGee ** / Hans Tashjian * (December [15m and] 16)
Ensemble: Ricardo Garcia ** / Andres Acosta

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Patrick Summers, *Margaret Alkek Williams Chair* / Benjamin Manis (December [15m and] 16)
Director: Omer Ben Seadia
Dramaturg: Jeremy Johnson
Set Designer: Amy Rubin *
Costume Designer: Jessica Jahn
Lighting Designer: Michael James Clark

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra

Music by Joel Thompson, libretto by Andrea Davis Pinkney, based on the children's picture book by Ezra Jack Keats.



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

GUARANTOR

The Robert and Janice McNair Foundation
The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
The Cullen Foundation

GRAND UNDERWRITER

Bank of America

UNDERWRITER

The Powell Foundation

Poulenc: *Dialogues of the Carmelites*

Performance Dates: January 14, 16m, 19, 22, 2022
Sung in French with projected English translations

CAST

Blanche: Natalya Romaniw #
Madame Lidoine: Christine Goerke
Madame Croissy: Anna Caterina Antonacci *
Mother Marie: Jennifer Johnson Cano *
Sister Constance: Lauren Snouffer #
Marquis: Rod Gilfry
Chevalier: Eric Taylor **
Father Confessor of the Convent: TBA
Mother Jeanne: Emily Treigle **
Sister Mathilde: Sun-Ly Pierce **
Jailer: Blake Denson **
M. Javelinot / Thierry: Luke Sutliff **
First Commissioner: Ricardo Garcia **
Second Commissioner: Geoffrey Hahn #
First Officer: William Guanbo Su **

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Patrick Summers, *Margaret Alkek Williams Chair*
Director: Francesca Zambello
Set Designer: Hildegard Bechtler *
Costume Designer: Claudie Gastine *
Lighting Designer: Mark McCullough
Chorus Master: Richard Bado, *Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair #*

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus

GRAND UNDERWRITER

Dian and Harlan Stai

Mozart: *Magic Flute*

Performance Dates: February 4, 6m, 8, 10, 12, 13m, 2022

Sung in German with projected English translations

CAST

Pamina: Andrea Carroll #

Queen of the Night: Rainelle Krause *

Tamino: Norman Reinhardt #

Papageno: Thomas Glass #

Sarastro/Sprecher: Anthony Robin Schneider #

Papagena: Raven McMillon **

1st Lady: Soula Parassidis *

2nd Lady: Sun-Ly Pierce **

3rd Lady: Taylor Raven *

Monostatos: Aaron Pegram

First Armored Man: Eric Taylor **

Second Armored Man: William Guanbo Su **

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Dame Jane Glover

Original Co-Director: Suzanne Andrade *

Original Co-Director: Barrie Kosky

Revival Director: Tobias Ribitzki *

Associate Director: Erik Friedman *

Set Designer: Esther Bialas *

Costume Designer: Esther Bialas *

Original Lighting Designer: Diego Leetz

Animation Designer: Paul Barritt *

Chorus Master: Richard Bado, *Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair* #

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus

Original production created by Komische Oper Berlin

GRAND UNDERWRITER:

Margaret Alkek Williams

Claire Liu and Joseph Greenberg

GUARANTORS:

The Humphreys Foundation

Puccini: *Turandot*

Performance Dates: April 22, 24m, 30, May 3, 6, 2022

Sung in Italian with projected English translations

CAST

Princess Turandot: Tamara Wilson #
Prince Calaf: Kristian Benedikt *
Liù: Nicole Heaston #
Timur: Peixin Chen #
Ping: Takaoki Onishi *
Pang: TBA
Pong: Eric Taylor **
A Mandarin: William Guanbo Su **
Emperor Altoum: TBA

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Eun Sun Kim
Stage Director, Set and Lighting Designer: Robert Wilson
Co-Stage Director: Nicola Panzer
Co-Set Designer: Stephanie Engeln *
Costume Designer: Jacques Reynaud *
Makeup and Hair Designer: Manu Halligan *
Co-Lighting Designer: John Torres *
Video Artist: Tomek Jeziorski *
Chorus Master: Richard Bado, *Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair* #

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra, Chorus, and Children's Chorus

Co-production with Teatro Real of Madrid, Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre Vilnius, Canadian Opera Company of Toronto, and Opéra National de Paris

GRAND GUARANTOR

The Brown Foundation, Inc.
Louisa Stude Sarofim Foundation

GUARANTOR

Margaret Alkelk Williams
Nina and Michael Zilkha
The Robert & Jane Cizik Foundation

Gounod: *Romeo and Juliet*

Performance Dates: April 29, May 1m, 5m (Student Matinee), 7, 10m (Student Matinee), 11, 2022
Sung in French with projected English translations

CAST

Romeo: Michael Spyres / Ricardo Garcia ** (May 5m and 10m)
Juliet: Adriana Gonzalez * / Elena Villalón ** (May 5m and 10m)
Mercutio: Thomas Glass # / Luke Sutliff ** (May 5m and 10m)
Friar Laurence: Nicholas Newton #



Count Capulet: Donnie Ray Albert
Tybalt: Eric Taylor **
Stephano: Sun-Ly Pierce **
Duke of Verona: Cory McGee **
Gertrude: Emily Treigle **
Gregorio: Blake Denson **
Benvolio: TBA
Paris: Geoffrey Hahn #

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Speranza Scappucci * / Benjamin Manis (May 5m and 10m)
Director: Tomer Zvulun
Original Set Designer: John Conklin
Scenic Adaptation: Julia Noulain-Mérat *
Costume Designer: Gregory Gale
Lighting Designer: Thomas Hase *
Choreographer / Associate Director: TBA
Chorus Master: Richard Bado, *Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair #*

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus

Co-production with The Atlanta Opera and The Dallas Opera