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Houston Grand Opera to Present World Premiere of *The Root of the Wind Is Water* May 13 and 15

Chamber opera about Gulf Coast hurricanes to be performed in Houston and Galveston

Houston, January 13, 2015—Houston Grand Opera (HGO) will present the world premiere of *The Root of the Wind Is Water*, a chamber opera by composer **David Hanlon** and librettist **Stephanie Fleischmann**, directed by **Matthew Ozawa**, on **May 13 at 7 p.m. at the Wortham Theater Center** and on **May 15 at 7 p.m. at The Grand 1894 Opera House** in Galveston. Presented under the auspices of HGOco, the company's community collaboration and education initiative, *The Root of the Wind Is Water* explores the impact of hurricanes on the Texas Gulf Coast through the eyes of the residents who call the region home. The opera will be HGO's 61st world premiere.

Developed through historical research and interviews with residents of Galveston and Houston, this riveting chamber opera is rooted in one family's crisis in the midst of a natural disaster. As a massive hurricane hurtles towards the Gulf Coast, a Galvestonian torn about whether to leave her home is haunted by storms past. A story of loss, resilience, and the power of community, *The Root of the Wind Is Water* mines the legacy of the Great Storm of 1900 and Hurricane Ike in 2008 on the region.

"As a recent Houston transplant, Hurricane Ike was my baptism into the world of Gulf weather," explains composer David Hanlon. "After the storm, sweltering in my powerless apartment, I listened on a portable radio to voices from across the Gulf region sharing stories, tips on where to find ice, or word from Galveston. It was as if the community was rebuilding itself on the airwaves, voice by voice. When HGO was looking for stories that would resonate with contemporary life in Houston, I wanted to return to those voices as the foundation of a new opera."

Adds librettist Stephanie Fleischmann, "Our encounters with Galvestonians past and present via interviews and hours spent perusing the archives have been tremendously moving to us—as was

speaking with Houstonians about their storm experiences. The challenge of honoring all these voices, of incorporating them into a living narrative, one that truly sings, has been both a humbling experience and a thrilling one.”

The cast of *The Root of the Wind Is Water* features artists of the Houston Grand Opera Studio: mezzo-soprano **Sofia Selowsky** as Eliza Goodman and soprano **Mane Galoyan** as Lucy Goodman. Rounding out the cast are soprano **Lindsay Russell** as Bettie/Bea, mezzo-soprano **Cecilia Duarte** as Harriet/First Responder, tenor **Mark Thomas** as Isaiah/Pastor’s Son, and bass-baritone **Thomas Richards**, an HGO Studio alumnus, as Cyclone/Wilbur.

Composer David Hanlon’s 2013 HGOco-commissioned opera *Past the Checkpoints*, which he also conducted, was performed throughout Texas and was featured by Opera America in its 2014 New Works Showcase. The *Houston Chronicle* praised the work as “accessible, relevant, and important.” In 2014 HGOco premiered his chamber vocal piece *The Ninth November I Was Hiding*. Hanlon, a former Adler Fellow with San Francisco Opera and an HGO Studio alumnus, acted as music advisor for HGO’s world premiere of Gregory Spears and Royce Vavrek’s *O Columbia*, and provided music supervision for the mariachi operas *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* and *El Pasado Nunca Se Termina* at HGO, Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Diego Opera, and Arizona Opera.

Playwright and librettist Stephanie Fleischmann has contributed libretti for the opera *The Long Walk* (music by Jeremy Howard Beck), which premiered at Opera Saratoga in July 2015 and was also performed at American Lyric Theater and Utah Opera, and for the klezmer opera *The Property* (music by Wlad Marhulets) for Lyric Opera of Chicago’s Lyric Unlimited program. Her music theater works include *The Sweetest Life* (music by Saskia Lane) and *The Secret Lives of Coats and Red Fly/Blue Bottle* (music by Christina Campanella).

Stage director Matthew Ozawa directed HGO’s 2014 hit production of *A Little Night Music* and led the 2013 world premiere of HGOco’s *The Memory Stone*. Recent directing credits include *Nabucco* at Lyric Opera of Chicago, the world premiere of *Hand Eye* with eighth blackbird at Carnegie Hall and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the American premiere of *Arizona Lady* at Arizona Opera, the world premiere of Matthew Aucoin’s *Second Nature* at Lyric Unlimited, and the world premiere of *Tsuru* with Houston Ballet at the Asia Society Texas Center. Ozawa is the founder and artistic director of Mozawa, a performing arts company that generates creative and cultural hybrid works of art.

Since 2007, HGOco has commissioned 18 new works and three song cycles and has conducted innovative community projects reaching more than one million people in the Greater Houston metropolitan area. HGOco creates opportunities for Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to observe, participate in, and create art. Through projects like *The Root of the Wind Is Water*, HGOco endeavors to make opera relevant to its changing audiences by connecting the company with the diverse Houston community through collaboration.

The Root of the Wind Is Water is the second of three new chamber operas to be commissioned in the award-winning *Song of Houston* series, an ongoing initiative within HGOco that creates new works based on stories that define the unique character of Houston. This new chapter of commissions for *Song of Houston* began with the September 2015 world premiere of *O Columbia*, a chamber opera informed by interviews with the NASA community. Previous *Song of Houston* projects include 2007's *The Refuge*, a groundbreaking musical tapestry of immigrant stories from various Houston communities; 2010's *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna / To Cross the Face of the Moon*, the world's first mariachi opera; and *East + West* (2010–14), a four-year series of eight chamber operas telling contemporary stories from Houston's Asian communities. In 2009 the program received the Leading Lights Diversity Award in Arts and Culture from the National MultiCultural Institute (NCMI).

The Root of the Wind Is Water is made possible through generous support by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, ConocoPhillips, Occidental Petroleum Corporation, the Albert and Anne Chao/Ting Tsung and Wei Fong Chao Foundation, and Bank of America.

World Premiere

David Hanlon and Stephanie Fleischmann: *The Root of the Wind Is Water*

Sung in English with projected text

May 13 at 7 p.m. at Wortham Theater Center's Cullen Theater

May 15 at 7 p.m. at The Grand 1894 Opera House in Galveston

Eliza Goodman	Sofia Selowsky *
Lucy Goodman	Mane Galoyan *
Bettie/Bea	Lindsay Russell
Harriet/First Responder	Cecilia Duarte
Isaiah/Pastor's Son	Mark Thomas
Cyclone/Wilbur	Thomas Richards**
Conductor	David Hanlon**
Stage Director	Matthew Ozawa

* *HGO Studio artist*

** *Former HGO Studio artist*

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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 57 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 observe, participate in, and create 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 200,000 Houstonians to experience first-quality opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

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