

## **Houston Grand Opera Appoints Jennifer Bowman as Director of Community and Learning**

*2022-23 season brings exciting and enriching experiences to the Houston community*

HOUSTON—May 23, 2022— After an extensive search, Houston Grand Opera (HGO) is proud to announce **Jennifer Bowman** as the company's new Director of Community and Learning (formerly HGOco).

Jennifer Bowman, a native Houstonian, joins HGO after five years as the Director of Music Education at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. She was a standout among a large pool of candidates because of her demonstrated success collaborating with communities, fostering diversity in the arts, and supporting the development of vibrant, relevant new works.

“When we embarked on this search, we knew we wanted a leader that shared our passion for great art and our belief that everyone should be able to experience its power. Throughout her impactful career, Jennifer has shown a remarkable commitment to producing work that speaks to her entire community while building new audiences. A thought leader in our field, she is a true inspiration, and we are so excited to bring her back to Houston and hit the ground running with her,” says **HGO General Director and CEO Khori Dastoor**.

As the Kennedy Center's Director of Music Education, Bowman developed performance programming and educational initiatives in collaboration with the National Symphony Orchestra (NSO), Washington National Opera (WNO), and the Center's hip hop, jazz, and chamber music programs. Among her notable achievements, she served as the Center's lead representative for the Washington Musical Pathways Initiative for young BIPOC artists wishing to pursue advanced study in music; spearheaded WNO's 18-month community engagement project in support of *Blue*, an opera about a Harlem family's experience with police brutality; revamped the Center's training programs for young musicians; commissioned new works that reflect the population of the region served by the Center; and introduced youth and family audiences to diverse artists making their Center debuts.

Bowman's career began at the Kennedy Center, where she coordinated professional development programs for chief executives and staff for over 600 arts and cultural organizations in the U.S. and abroad. In 2020, she co-led Music Academy of the West's transition to an online summer festival in response to the pandemic; she remains a member of the organization's Innovation & Education Committee. In addition, Bowman is a member of the third cohort of Sphinx LEAD (Leaders in Excellence, Arts & Diversity). She assumes her new position with HGO on June 6, 2022.

“My first foray into the operatic world took place at Houston Grand Opera. It was an experience I will never forget. I am honored to bring my career full circle and return to my hometown in this exciting role,” states Bowman. “HGO has a rich and well-deserved reputation for providing world-class art both in and outside of the theater. The organization's Community and Learning initiative has set the standard in the industry, and it is truly thrilling to have the opportunity to build upon its many successes. I cannot wait to get to work!”

HGO Community and Learning, previously HGOco, underwent a name change after the appointment of Dastoor as General Director and CEO in 2021. Under Dastoor's leadership, the company felt it important to showcase this extraordinary initiative with a name that reflects the deep commitment of the entire organization, and the ownership of this important work across the company. A selection of upcoming programming for Community and Learning includes:

- ***Another City***: In March 2023, HGO will present *Another City*, the newest opera in the company's award-winning *Song of Houston* series, which supports the development of new works based on stories that define the unique character of Houston. Composer **Jeremy Howard Beck** and librettist **Stephanie Fleischmann** explore an often-unseen side of the city with an opera centered around our homeless community that reflects upon what it means to be home, to have a home, and to share the home that we call Houston.
- ***Seeking the Human Spirit***: HGO's six-year artistic and collaborative community initiative culminates in 2023 with a set of six chamber-scale commissions, each of which responds to one of the program's six annual themes, all grounded in opera's universality. Together six composer/librettist teams will premiere new works centering around sacrifice, transformation, identity, faith, character, and spirit.
- ***Monkey and Francine in the City of Tigers***: Starting in fall 2022, **Kamala Sankaram** and **David Johnston**'s HGO-commissioned original opera will begin touring schools, libraries, and community spaces across Houston as part of the company's popular Opera to Go! program. Drawing on Bollywood, opera, and Ethiopian jazz and inspired by monkey stories from India, China, and West Africa, the work shares the tale of a pair of siblings who must outwit a crocodile. Other initiatives for students include the Storybook Opera program and student performances of *La traviata* in fall 2022.
- ***The Big Swim***: This new family-friendly chamber opera from composer **Meilina Tsui** and librettist **Melisa Tien**, currently in development by HGO in partnership with the Asia Society Texas Center (ASTC), shares the story of the Jade Emperor and the Great Race. The work will premiere at ASTC in February 2024 as part of its Lunar New Year festivities.

"By creating connections with our dynamic, diverse community, whether at the Wortham or at other spaces throughout our city, HGO has touched the lives of hundreds of thousands of Houstonians, allowing them to find common ground and share in the transformational power of the human voice," says Dastoor. "This is at the core of everything we do, and the reason why it has been so important to us to recruit a strong leader for our new Director of Community and Learning. I am happy to say that with Jennifer Bowman on board, the future is shining bright."

To learn more about HGO's Community and Learning initiatives, visit [HGO.org/Community](https://HGO.org/Community).

### **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 and producing new works (72

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 and Learning initiative 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.

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