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Discussion of Art and Activism to Feature Groundbreaking Stage Director Peter Sellars March 20 at Rothko Chapel

Houston, February 23, 2018— Renowned experimental, often-controversial opera and theater director **Peter Sellars** will join **Debbie McNulty**, director of **Mayor Turner's Office of Cultural Affairs**, and **Patrick Summers**, artistic director of **Houston Grand Opera**, in a public conversation about art and activism moderated by the **Rothko Chapel's** executive director, **David Leslie**, on **Tuesday, March 20, 7–8:30 p.m.** at the Rothko Chapel, 3900 Yupon St., Houston. The “pay what you can” event has a suggested value of \$20. Registration is advised; visit rothkochapel.org or call 713-524-9839. The program, called **Art and Activism: An Evening with Peter Sellars**, is co-presented by the Rothko Chapel and Houston Grand Opera (HGO) in conjunction with HGO's *Seeking the Human Spirit* initiative. *Seeking the Human Spirit* is a six-year multidisciplinary effort designed to highlight the universal spiritual themes raised in opera and to expand and deepen Houstonians' connections to opera and to art. The Rothko Chapel has joined in HGO's initiative to explore the power of the human spirit to rise up and address social injustices and inequality through creative expression.

The arts play an important connecting role in society in ways that other sectors cannot. Artists can move through a variety of environments using music, performance, visual arts, and other media to address difficult topics, challenge cultural stigmas, bring diverse people together, and provoke new ways of thinking that can lead to powerful social and political changes. In a time of censorship, political bullying, and polarization among people, where do the arts stand today, locally and nationally? What is the role of the arts as commentator and catalyst for social justice? And what is the responsibility of cultural institutions and patrons for preserving the arts as a voice for the public? The panel will address these and other questions from the viewpoints of the artist, the cultural institution, and the funder.

About the presenters

Peter Sellars has gained international renown for his innovative and transformative interpretations of artistic masterpieces and for collaborative projects with an extraordinary range of creative artists. In 1987, he collaborated with composer John Adams and librettist Alice Goodman to create the groundbreaking opera *Nixon in China*, which he directed in its world premiere at Houston Grand Opera. Recent projects include an acclaimed production of *La clemenza di Tito* at the 2017 Salzburg Festival, a concert staging of *The Cunning Little Vixen* with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, and the premiere of his latest collaboration with John Adams, *Girls of the Golden West*, at San Francisco Opera. He has staged Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in an urban ghetto and *The Marriage of Figaro* in a corporate high-rise. As a distinguished professor in the Department of World Arts and Cultures at UCLA, Sellars encourages his students to use art to articulate moral questions. He has focused on such issues as the slow-food movement, the war on drugs, and contemporary slavery. In 2015, he told the *Wall Street Journal*, "Art gives you a way not only to recognize beauty but to recognize pain. Art was invented as a way to face really difficult things with a sense that in facing them, you've already started the healing process." Sellars has been honored with numerous awards and prizes in the U.S. and Europe, including the MacArthur Fellowship and the Polar Music Prize.

Debbie McNulty served as lead consultant for the City of Houston's Arts and Cultural Plan before being appointed director of the Houston Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs in 2015. Her extensive experience includes work in philanthropy, public-private partnerships, community-based organizations and the arts. She was a program officer with Houston Endowment Inc., working primarily in the areas of arts and culture and community and economic development. She then became executive director of Art League Houston, a nonprofit art school and gallery, coordinating the development and construction of their expanded facility. McNulty also previously served as director of the Civic Art and Design Program at the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County (now Houston Arts Alliance), having worked with the program from its inception in 1994 and throughout the effort that resulted in the adoption the Houston percent-for-art ordinance in 1999.

Patrick Summers was named artistic and music director of Houston Grand Opera in 2011 after serving as the company's music director since 1998. He has conducted more than 60 operas at HGO and is responsible for many important artistic advances, including the development of the HGO Orchestra. Highlights of his work include conducting the company's first-ever complete cycle of Wagner's *Ring* and its first performances of the Verdi Requiem and collaborating on the world premieres of André Previn's *Brief Encounter*; Christopher Theofanidis's *The Refuge*; Jake Heggie's *It's a Wonderful Life*, *The End of the Affair*, and *Three Decembers*; Carlisle Floyd's *Cold Sassy Tree* and *Prince of Players*; and Tod Machover's *Resurrection*. He led the American premiere of Weinberg's Holocaust opera, *The Passenger*, at Houston Grand Opera and on tour to the Lincoln Center Festival. He has nurtured the careers of artists including Christine Goerke, Ailyn Pérez, Joyce DiDonato, Ana María Martínez, Ryan McKinny, Tamara Wilson, Albina Shagimuratova, Anthony Roth Costanzo, Norman Reinhardt, Jamie Barton, and Dimitri Pittas. Maestro Summers has a long association with San Francisco Opera, where he was honored in 2015 with the company's highest honor, the San Francisco Opera Medal.

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About the Rothko Chapel

The Rothko Chapel is open to the public every day of the year at no charge and successfully interconnects art, spirituality, and compassionate action through a broad array of free public programs. Founded by Houston philanthropists Dominique and John de Menil, the chapel was dedicated in 1971 as an intimate sanctuary. Today it stands as a monument to art, spirituality, and human rights. As an independent nonprofit, non-governmental organization, the chapel depends on contributions from foundations and individuals to support its mission of creating a space for contemplation and dialogue on important issues. To learn more about the Rothko Chapel and the full calendar of upcoming programs, workshops and events, visit rothkochapel.org.

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 at the 2017 International Opera Awards. In fulfilling its mission to advance the operatic art to serve an ever-evolving audience, HGO has led the field in commissioning new works (65 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 multi-year 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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