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A new season lies before us at HGO, and with it, an entirely new era.

I’m thrilled to welcome our new General Director, Khori Dastoor, to Houston. In her short time with us, she has already been an innovative, whip-smart, collaborative, dynamic leader. With Khori guiding us into it, the future looks bright indeed.

I must also warmly welcome you to the Wortham Theater Center, and to the very first grand opera HGO has staged since winter 2020. What a gift to be here with you for Bizet’s Carmen, the most beloved opera of all time and the perfect work to open this very long-awaited season. You are in for a beautiful evening, full of passion and mad love.

We originally had planned to present this celebrated production—created by director/choreographer Rob Ashford for HGO and Lyric Opera of Chicago in 2014—as part of last season’s fall repertoire. After a year’s delay, I’m so excited to finally bring Ashford back to Houston. In his wonderful interpretation of the opera, our extraordinary heroine’s quest for freedom is told through not only the most famous music in the canon, but lots of spectacular dance.

Incredible conductor Lidiya Yankovskaya is taking the podium for this production in her company debut. Yankovskaya has garnered a great deal of critical and audience acclaim, and she has other debuts scheduled around the world, from Dallas Opera to Opera Seville. I can’t wait for you to experience her talent and musicality as she conducts Bizet’s gorgeous score.

It is especially gratifying to share that both our Carmen and our Don José are alumni of the HGO Studio, the company’s training ground for the next generation of opera stars. Mezzo-soprano Carolyn Sproule (2012-14) and tenor Richard Trey Smagur (2017-20) bring their prodigious gifts to this production’s lead roles, joined by soprano Heidi Stober, another HGO Studio alumna (2004-6), as Micaela, and bass-baritone Christian Pursell as Escamillo in his company debut.

With the opening of HGO’s new season, the fiery passion of Carmen is back, rising from the ashes of a tragic period in our shared history. The passion we feel for this art form, meanwhile, has never left us, but burned and burned. It is so good to be here at the Wortham’s Brown Theater, presenting this masterpiece for you, our dear audience, with a full season of grand opera ahead. Let us savor this moment, and this performance, together.

Patrick Summers
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BRILLIANCE IN BOULDER
Joel Thompson debuts a new original work.

Composer Joel Thompson, who together with librettist Andrea Davis Pinkney created the HGO-commissioned world-premiere opera opening this December, The Snowy Day, has been very busy. The “brilliant young composer,” as HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers calls him, premiered another new work, To Awaken the Sleeper, this August in Boulder at the Colorado Music Festival.

The piece, commissioned by the festival, sets the writings of James Baldwin to music. CMF artistic director Peter Oundjian asked Thompson to develop the work last year after the murder of George Floyd. Thompson is also the composer of Seven Last Words of the Unarmed, a devastating and moving piece that sets the last words of seven Black men killed in encounters with authority figures. (For more on that, see p. 58.)

Thompson’s new original composition features a narrator’s voice reciting Baldwin’s words interwoven with his orchestral score. His goal, as he explained to the Denver Westword, was “to make art that is honest about this moment but still looks forward with hope.”

HGO Dramaturg Jeremy Johnson was able to be in the audience for the work’s premiere and called it “AMAZING.” Caps all his.

And speaking of Colorado, this summer HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers spent eight weeks there.

Summers and superstar soprano Renée Fleming were announced as co-artistic directors of the newly reimagined Aspen Opera Theater and VocalARTS program for young artists two years ago. The program had to go digital for summer 2020, but for 2021 the two opera greats were finally able to convene in the mountains, where they worked intensively with a scaled back inaugural class of 15 artists.

The program included a public performance of Mozart’s The Magic Flute, conducted by Maestro Summers. Because of safety protocols, it was a shorter version of the opera, with no sets or dialogue. But as Summers told the Aspen Times, the production provided a unique opportunity. “This is allowing the focus to be on the artists themselves,” he explained, “on the music and their relationship with the words and music and Mozart.”

Summers and Fleming took over leadership of the program from beloved longtime director Edward Berkeley, who adapted and directed the very same production of The Magic Flute. Tragically, Berkeley passed away in Aspen right before the opera opened. As Summers wrote at the time, “His life ended in the place he loved most, in the Rocky Mountains, and it ended with Mozart.”
MILAGRO DE NAVIDAD
An HGO world premiere opens in Arizona.

One way HGO makes sure its budget goes as far as possible—and expands its artistic reach as far as possible—is by pooling resources with other opera companies to co-commission new works. Our 2019 world-premiere work, El Milagro del Recuerdo (The Miracle of Remembering), is a co-production with Arizona Opera and San Diego Opera.

El Milagro del Recuerdo is part of HGO’s beloved mariachi opera series, and the prequel to another company world premiere, Cruzar la Cara de la Luna (To Cross the Face of the Moon). It was written by Javier Martínez, the son of José “Pepe” Martínez (1941-2016), the longtime music director of Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán and composer of HGO’s first two mariachi operas.

Set in Michoacán, Mexico during the holidays, El Milagro del Recuerdo shares the sweet story of a young couple who are in love but struggling. Laurentino is a migrant worker who’s traveled home from the United States for Christmas, and his wife Renata wants him to stay in Mexico permanently. The work is a poignant exploration of holiday traditions and family bonds.

This December, El Milagro del Recuerdo will make its regional premiere with Arizona Opera, at the Herberger Theater Center in Phoenix and the Temple of Music and Art in Tucson. We can’t wait for their audiences to experience this new holiday tradition!

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With its instantly recognizable tunes, renowned cast, and colorful dance-filled production from Broadway director Rob Ashford, what better production to mark HGO’s triumphant return to live performances?

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It is wonderful to be here with you tonight as HGO welcomes audiences back for the first time since March 2020. I hope you enjoy the performance and the entire HGO season ahead.

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Getting to know Khori Dastoor, HGO’s new General Director and CEO, in a most Houston way

By Catherine Matusow

It’s a blazing hot Friday afternoon at Pinkerton’s Barbecue on Airline Drive. Out on the patio, smoke billows overhead, carrying with it delectable smells. The sounds of grackles, Spanish-language announcements from the bus station next door, and a rowdy group of co-workers celebrating with tequila shots fills the air.

At a picnic table near the back fence, sitting in front of a spread of brisket, ribs, and today’s special, Frito pie, is Houston Grand Opera’s new General Director and CEO, Khori Dastoor, having lunch, her mask tucked under a tray.

In her first address to HGO’s staff and artists this summer, she told her new team she was planning a quest to find the best barbecue in town, hence this pit stop at Pinkerton’s. She takes a bite of the Frito-based Texan dish. It’s new to her, but you would never know it. She fits right in here, her soft voice somehow perfectly clear through the noise as she warms to the subject of the universality of Carmen.

“Carmen is us, Dastoor reflects, but society is us too. When she dies, we’re all culpable. “The opera is about watching those tensions and watching the society cope with this individual who’s challenging everything. And oftentimes opera ends in death because that tension has to resolve. We need harmony again.”

The opera was one thing to Dastoor as a teenager; it’s another now that she’s a mother of daughters; one day, she knows, it will be something else. And her connection to Bizet’s masterpiece goes all the way back to 1875.

When she’s traveling, Dastoor explains, she and her children read a book called The Invisible Thread. “So, they know that there’s an invisible thread that connects me to them, and they send a whisper down the thread, and I send a whisper back,” she says. “And I feel that thread going back to the opening night of Carmen.”

She wonders aloud just how many human beings, over the course of history, have experienced Bizet’s score, whether there is some way to calculate it. “It continues to be the most successful single ticket draw of any opera we do,” she says, “and that’s why it’s going to be our first piece back, because it’s going to compel people to join us again after 18 months.”

When asked about evolving interpretations of the characters, Dastoor’s eyes flash. Her voice becomes emphatic. It’s as if she feels protective of this opera that means so much to her. “It’s not about someone needing to explain Carmen to me,” she says. “I know what I’m seeing. I know what I’m getting from it. Don’t explain to me what I’m supposed to hear. Try to cancel it. It’s not possible, because it’s there, it’s in our culture. So is that violence. So is that expression of oppression.”

During the conversation in the Houston heat, Dastoor has one foot in her new life in this city, and one in her soon-to-be-former life in San José, California, where she is wrapping up her duties as General Director and CEO of Opera San José through the end of the year. She and her family will be living in Houston full time as of January 2022.

“Houston,” Dastoor says, “is a city that typifies where we are right now as a country and as a culture. And HGO has shown a mitochondrial commitment to new work and commissioning the next generation of stories, American stories.”

So when HGO, searching for its next General Director, called, she knew it was her chance to take everything she’s learned
over her multifaceted career and apply it on an international scale. “It’s the kind of call,” she says, “that you don’t let yourself imagine will come.”

While Dastoor’s path to assuming leadership of HGO is far from linear, there is a thread that extends all the way back to her childhood: her love of music.

“At a very young age when my friends and peers were finding a lot of community and belonging in team sports and in popular music, I was always super fascinated with classical music,” she remembers. She spent a lot of time by herself, absorbed in fairy tales and story ballets and painted books, practicing singing and teaching herself piano. “Figuring out how to express myself through my voice and through singing and through song has always been a part of me.”

It is, perhaps, no surprise that music was always a part of Dastoor’s family, too. Her parents both emigrated to the U.S., her father from India and mother from Indonesia via Holland, and they met in Ohio before driving to Southern California in a VW bus, settling in Pasadena, and starting a family. They were two hippies in love, but they came from different cultures and grew up speaking different languages.

“And one of the common things that they had was a shared love of music and classical music,” Dastoor remembers, adding: “The idea that opera is a Eurocentric art form or that Beethoven belongs to one culture more than another just isn’t my experience. It’s not my lived experience, because there are certain works of art that are just truly universal.”

Dastoor’s parents supported her interest in music, ferrying her to and from performances with the LA Children’s Chorus, while pushing her academically. She inherited from them a belief in hard work, education, putting in the hours to succeed, and striving for excellence.

When Dastoor decided to pursue a voice degree at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, it was a “conversation,” because her parents weren’t sure it was practical, but they continued to support her. “For me, the biggest gift they gave me was the privilege of being able to think about what brings joy and happiness to my life,” she says.

And so she had an inspiring, eye-opening experience in college, a period when she realized there were others out there who shared her passion, absorbed as much as she could from her peers and professors, and “attended performances every night of the week.” She remembers her college years as a “love affair with classical music” and a “spiritual awakening.”

Later she worked with LA Opera as a teaching artist with the Education Department and pursued her master’s and doctorate degrees in Opera Studies at UCLA. “It was just an incredible place to be as a graduate student,” she says. Philip Glass was on campus. She served as TA for Peter Sellars and for Bob Israel. She met then unknown composer Jake Heggie and wrote about his work. Then, when she was just shy of completing her doctorate, Irene Dalis of San José Opera hired her as a soprano with the company’s resident ensemble of principal artists, and a new era in her life began.
Dastoor brings with her to Houston Grand Opera a multitude of perspectives acquired over a fascinating and diverse career. When you put together her years spent as a soprano, her subsequent time spent at a foundation that assesses and funds arts initiatives, and her direct experience in arts administration, a picture begins to emerge, one of a leader able to approach her position from any number of angles.

In self-deprecating fashion, Dastoor describes her performance career as “not particularly remarkable, but incredibly educational.” For years she lived out of a suitcase, working in a lot of different styles, languages, and countries. She interacted with patrons, donors, supporters, and audience members in America and sang on stages all over the world. She observed how in Europe, opera is “a part of life in a different way, like breathing in and out.” And she soon found herself pondering what she thought was successful, and what was less so.

“Ultimately, I felt like I had something to say there, not just with my voice, but on the producing side, on the side of determining which teams were going to be making creative decisions.”

Then Dastoor’s life changed again. She got married, and she took a position as a grants administrator with the Packard Humanities Institute, a Silicon Valley non-profit dedicated to archaeology, music, film preservation, and historical archives. “I was able to contribute to partnerships with the most important cultural institutions in the world,” she says, institutions like the Mozarteum in Salzburg and the Bach-Archiv in Leipzig, “and observe excellence at a level that just blew my mind.”

Dastoor learned how to evaluate institutional strength, how decisions get made around partnerships between institutions and grantees, and how to support project teams on the ground. And perhaps most important, she “learned a tremendous amount about kind of the special sauce needed to make a project successful.”

From PHI President David W. Packard, she learned that sauce’s main ingredient, which is that, “at the end of the day, most successful things are driven by an authentic and visionary leader who just won’t accept no for an answer.” She also learned to keep an eye on what matters. “The art is what’s important. We’re not going to make compromises when it comes to the art.”

While she was with PHI, Dastoor remained involved with Opera San José. In 2013 she was named Artistic Advisor to OSJ under founder Irene Dalis, and in 2015, she became Director of Artistic Planning under General Director Larry Hancock. After major successes including the American premiere of Alma Deutcher’s Cinderella and a celebrated new production of Jake Heggie’s Moby-Dick, Dastoor was named the company’s new General Director in 2019, succeeding Hancock after his retirement.

“Houston Grand Opera’s commitment to new work, to innovation, and to driving reform forward—that’s what’s compelling to me about the job. And Houston, I think, is better poised to tackle it than any other company in the country.”

Dastoor’s time in the role has been shorter than expected, but transformational nonetheless. Almost right off the bat, she had to confront the challenges of COVID, launching the nation’s first relief fund for artists and musicians while establishing a new digital media studio that has partnered with dozens of companies across the country and increased the company’s patron base. “It opened my eyes around what an opera company can be 365 days a year, despite a pandemic, despite not being able to perform. We were still serving our mission.”

Sitting at the picnic table at Pinkerton’s, Dastoor seems to reflect on what, exactly, has brought her to this place. “My life has been about opera,” she muses, “from being a children’s chorus participant to this new chapter in Houston.”
She thinks back to how she felt when she decided to stop singing, how she wondered how hard it would be, not having opera as part of her professional life. “Ultimately, I never had to answer the question, because it just stayed in my life in a creative way,” she says.

“And I found myself so much more fulfilled supporting artists, funding projects, identifying talent, being able to say yes to things, being able to make things happen, being able to choose what was really going to happen, and being in the driver’s seat in a way that I never had been.”

Now Dastoor is in the driver’s seat at HGO, charged with no less a task than steering one of the most important arts organizations in America, located in one of the country’s largest and most diverse cities, into the future.

“I feel, still, like I’m pinching myself for having earned the confidence of this board,” Dastoor says. “There’s no other institution in the world where I feel like I could have the impact I want to have. My ambition is to create new American stories for the stage and for online consumption, to really align this institution’s brand with the brand of American opera for the next century, and for patrons who are going to be consuming it 50 years from now.”

It’s only right, then, that she does so here in Houston. After all, this is a place where the future already has arrived, one that other cities will look like in a few decades. And while HGO is facing the same challenges as every other company in the industry—how to build audiences in a world with so many options, for an art form that requires an investment of time and energy to appreciate and enjoy—in important ways, the company is uniquely situated to address those challenges, and to lead the way.

“The opportunity is tremendous, and the potential is limitless,” says Dastoor. “Houston Grand Opera’s commitment to new work, to innovation, and to driving reform forward—that’s what’s compelling to me about the job. And Houston, I think, is better poised to tackle it than any other company in the country.”

Onstage and online, Dastoor wants HGO to perform universal stories—beloved operas like Carmen alongside new American works—that help us connect to one another while living in a world that can feel increasingly fractured. “What are our values? What makes us a nation?” she asks. “We consume different media and encounter different realities, so finding that societal connective tissue that will continue to bring us together becomes pretty important.

“You could argue that there’s a smaller marketplace for classical arts and culture, but I think there’s more need than ever before,” she continues. “If HGO can start with a mandate to serve people that live in a city that represents so many different walks of life and so many different worldviews, that’s an affirmation of our shared humanity.”

Letting the people who live here shape the path ahead: that is what Dastoor believes will determine HGO’s future. “And other companies won’t be doing that because that’s not their mandate, but it is Houston Grand Opera’s mandate, and it always has been,” she says. “And I think that Houston audiences know that that’s why HGO exists, and that they’re going to see us grappling with the messiness of that.”

As for Dastoor herself, she is excited to be making Houston her home, with all the grappling and all the messiness that entails. As lunch wraps up and she prepares to head out to her next meeting, she shares that she feels grateful—that her girls will grow up in a place that values the arts, that the community has been so welcoming, that Houstonians have stuck by HGO during this period of disruption. “This company has been able to continue to create excellent world-class programming, despite a hurricane, despite a pandemic, despite everything,” she says, “so I know the capacity is truly limitless.”

Of course, Dastoor is also deeply grateful that live grand opera is coming back. Like so many others who love this art form, she has missed it with her entire being. “I need—we need—to be in connection with one another. And if you look at the operatic canon, that’s what the stories are about.”
CALDER PICASSO

Pablo Picasso, Acrobat (Acrobate), 1930. © 2021 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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CONSIDERING Carmen

Great art, harmful stereotypes, and a 21st-century dilemma

By Jeremy Johnson, HGO Dramaturg

HGO's Carmen, 2014
If you could read Greek, and if you owned a copy of Prosper Mérimée’s 1845 novella Carmen, the basis for Bizet’s opera, you would notice that the tone of the story is revealed in its opening inscription by fifth century poet Palladas:

“Every woman is as bitter as gall. But she has two good moments: one in bed, the other at her death.”

Opening a novella by saying women are only good for sex is a far cry from our 21st-century view of Bizet’s famous opera, an interpretation that paints Carmen as a “free-spirited, independent woman” who simply happened upon a murderously possessive partner in Don José. If we look a bit more closely, however, we discover that the sexualization of the title character—and, more specifically, the exoticism of her ethnic minority—is precisely what Carmen is about.

Carmen has always been called a “g*psy,” an exonym for the Romani people that has long been used as a pejorative slur, often to justify oppressive public policy. It is a term that I’ll only use in sourced quotations in this article, edited as above, and one I encourage all of us to excise from our vocabularies because of its history—and its present—as a racist slur. It can easily be replaced with accepted endonyms for the ethnic group: Rom, Roma, or Romani people.

The slur’s etymology comes from “Egyptian,” a case of mistaken identity for the Roma who came to Europe through northern Africa. Linguistic and genetic evidence point to the Roma coming to Europe from northern India. Other groups of Roma that came through eastern Europe were also mistakenly identified as originating in Bohemia, hence another misnomer exonym for the Romani people, bohemians. (That exonym, on the other hand, has not historically been used as a pejorative slur in justifying oppressive public policy.)

The Romani people arrived in southern Spain through northern Africa as early as the 15th century, and possibly even centuries earlier. But as the various Spanish monarchies united and consolidated their power, the Roma were at the receiving end of oppressive policies. In 1609, King Philip III of Spain expelled all Roma from Spain, but, without any friendly politico-religious territories nearby, they stayed in the country as fugitives.

Forced assimilation or death followed the Roma in Spain for the next few generations. They survived by living on the fringes of society, always ready to flee at a moment’s notice, some even operating in illegal economies of drugs and smuggling. (These 17th-century realities, shaped by Spain’s public policy, provide the foundation for the most common stereotypes of the Romani people.)

In 1749, Ferdinand VI enacted La Gran Redada, also known as “The Great Raid” or “The Great G*psy Roundup.” The interior minister, in ordering the imprisonment of all Roma in Spain, announced, “These people called g*psies have no religion; they must be put in prison, and we will end this evil race.” These public policies of 17th- and 18th-century Spain, according to researchers Ismael Cortés and Cayetano Fernández of the universities of Jaume I and Granada, “established a moral hierarchy based on ethnic belonging and religious faith, and shaped the image of Roma in Spain as evil, godless and lazy people, and the enemies of Spanish values.”

La Gran Redada was only 82 years before Victor Hugo’s The Hunchback of Notre Dame, a novel that perhaps attempted to humanize Esmeralda—originally not Roma in the Hugo, but adopted as an orphan—but that nevertheless fed the narrative of the lawless, faithless, “evil race” of Romani people. Indeed, while Claude Frollo is seen now as the villain, his song in the Disney cartoon—which did turn Esmeralda into a Romani woman—represents what was the common stereotype of Romani women through the 18th and 19th centuries: that their eroticized presence was the very reason that “righteous” men “turn[ed] to sin.”
So, too, does Don José reflect the prevailing cultural attitudes toward Romani women in 19th-century Europe. A 21st-century, post-#MeToo opera industry will frame Carmen as the independent feminist and Don José as the possessive villain, yet the historical and cultural contexts in which Mérimée and Bizet wrote and adapted this story place the blame squarely on Carmen’s shoulders. José was a meek, humble Basque soldier before meeting Carmen, only too willing to listen to his mother and marry the homely, Christian girl Micaela. But the lawless, faithless Romani woman—who reads fortunes in cards, smuggles contraband, and lives on the outskirts of civilization—enters his life and corrupts him; therefore, tragedy ensues.

If it seems outdated to point to 18th- and 19th-century cultural contexts of Romani women, let me offer two—of many—unfortunate current events. In 2009, French authorities ordered all Roma to be expelled to their countries of origin, violating European Union regulations. In 2013, the co-founder of the Fidesz political party in Hungary—which still enjoys supermajority control in the country today—uttered these horrific words: “A significant part of the Roma are unfit for coexistence. They are not fit to live among people. These Roma are animals, and they behave like animals. [...] These animals shouldn’t be allowed to exist. In no way. That needs to be solved—immediately and regardless of the method.”

When art perpetuates harmful stereotypes that can influence the culture around them and, further, the oppressive policy that follows, what degree of responsibility connects them? Does Bizet’s Carmen have any indirect, cultural influence on the 21st-century examples of Roma oppression detailed above? It’s impossible to quantify, yet hundreds of years of censorship records (think Mozart’s The Marriage of Figaro or Verdi’s Rigoletto, among many) indicate that policymakers have long been aware that artistic depictions can and do influence contemporary cultural attitudes. As I often like to point out in my lectures contextualizing opera’s history, art is neither created nor consumed in a vacuum.

So far, I’ve only offered up a dilemma: inauthentic representations in opera often perpetuate harmful stereotypes of non-Western European cultures. So, what do we do about that? The next three articles in this series will explore some answers in the context of three more operas in our season: The Snowy Day, The Magic Flute, and Turandot. These articles won’t pretend to have all the answers, but rather will seek to illuminate some possibilities worth considering, while offering historical justifications for those possibilities.

For now, as you enjoy the exciting, powerful, and heartbreakingly beautiful music of Bizet’s Carmen, think about how the title character is perceived in the 21st century. Is Carmen an evil temptress who brings shame, dishonor, and tragedy to her community and to Don José? Is she a fiercely independent, sexually liberated woman who becomes the victim of a murderously possessive man? Or is she somewhere in between?

We have come a long way from the story’s original historical context in how we view Carmen as a woman and a victim. We can add another layer, too, in how we view her as a Romani woman. Does Carmen’s race influence your perception of her character? Would Carmen as an opera succeed dramaturgically if she were not a Roma? Listen and watch for the representations of Carmen as a Romani woman, and consider: would the opera lose any of its power, drama, or beauty—any of the artistic merit that makes it so immensely popular—if she were not a Romani woman? ■
CARMEN: 5 Things to Know

A dancing director, an opera’s evolution, a giant bull head, and more

ROB ASHFORD, DANCER

Before celebrated director-choreographer Rob Ashford became a Tony, Olivier, Emmy, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle winner who has worked with stars such as Scarlett Johansson and Daniel Radcliffe, he was a dancer himself, on Broadway, at the Metropolitan Opera, and elsewhere.

He studied dance at Point Park College in Pittsburgh while working in the corps de ballet at Pittsburgh Opera, and as he shared with HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers during a Monday Night Opera conversation, one of the operas he danced in was Bizet’s Carmen. “I just remember, at the time—doing it and thinking about it and watching it—and thinking, ‘there’s so much more dance in this. There should be so much more dance in this.’”

Ashford later switched career paths and became a director-choreographer, and HGO and Lyric Opera of Chicago co-commissioned him to create a new dance-filled version of the work. His Carmen made its premiere at HGO in 2014, in a production starring Ana María Martínez; it now returns as a revival to open HGO’s 2021-22 season.

Ashford says some of the most exciting works to choreograph and direct are the ones that aren’t known for having a lot of dance. “You have to find the dance and find the movement in it,” he explains, adding: “You know, movement and dance can be great adjectives for someone, they can describe someone so beautifully. … The most important thing about any dance or movement is that it tells a story. So, it’s not there for atmosphere.”

DIALOGUE SCRAPPED

Georges Bizet’s Carmen, which the composer completed in 1875, originally included spoken dialogue. Paris had a handful of opera houses, but the main two were the Paris Opera and the Opéra-Comique. “The two were rather split in the style of opera that could be performed,” explains HGO Dramaturg Jeremy Johnson. “It used to be very prescriptive.”

Opéra-Comique employed a lighter musical style that included dialogue, which was considered firmly outside the realm of high art. “It was more of a family affair,” says Johnson. “People brought their children to Opéra-Comique, and whether the plot was comedic or tragic, the works were lighter, not as heavy or ‘serious.’ And there was
always dialogue in between numbers. That was the structure at the time.”

Despite Carmen’s tragic story, Bizet never really wanted to write “serious” operas—that was Paris Opera territory, and he was a Comique man. “It was perhaps part of his personal insecurities,” explains Johnson, “that he did not consider himself good enough for the Paris Opera stage, but instead wanted to excel on the Comique stage.”

The opera’s premiere was not well-received. Bizet was contracted to adapt the work for the Vienna State Opera, which would not have accepted spoken dialogue, but he died before he had the chance. And so, his friend Ernest Guiraud picked up where he left off, replacing the dialogue with musical recitatives, per Vienna tradition. And that is how we got the version of Carmen that we know and love today, whose success, sadly, Bizet never got to witness.

A THANK-YOU TO THE ACADEMY

In addition to directing and choreographing a host of Broadway productions and films, Rob Ashford has choreographed and staged the Academy Awards several times, including in 2014, some weeks before Carmen premiered in Houston. In fact, many of the same dancers who appeared in HGO’s production also had been set to perform during the Oscars, until—we’ll let Mark C. Lear, HGO Associate Artistic Administrator, tell the rest:

“For the original mounting of this production of Carmen in spring 2014, HGO had already planned for the dancers to join our rehearsals a couple of weeks later than the singer principals, just like we are planning this time,” he recalls. “In addition to directing-choreographing our Carmen, Rob Ashford had been engaged to choreograph the Academy Awards in Los Angeles right before Carmen in Houston.

“For the big dance number at the Oscars, he had the Academy Awards hire almost entirely the same company of dancers whom he had selected for us to engage for Carmen. The plan was for them to get a bit of a jump on Carmen in Los Angeles in between rehearsals for the Oscars. Well, as the time for the awards got closer, it was discovered that the whole show was running considerably longer than planned, so the big dance number was cut by the Academy Awards.

“With all this extra unused time on their hands under the Academy Awards contract, the dancers were able to thoroughly rehearse and polish Carmen prior to their arrival in Houston! We would like to thank the Academy for their contribution to the success of our Carmen production...”

NOT ALWAYS A HEROINE

When it comes to the character of Carmen, there are some things that today’s audiences and those from 1875 would agree on: she is compelling, powerful, seductive, and impossible to ignore. But that’s likely where the consensus ends.

The modern interpretation of Bizet’s opera and its libretto—written by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, based on the novella by Prosper Mérimée—diverges significantly from the creators’ original intent. While today’s audiences see a strong, independent woman seeking liberty above all else (and surrounded by a bunch of clueless men), audiences during Bizet’s time saw Carmen as so inappropriate as to be vile. Everything that happens to her, past thinking went, is the result of her own bad behavior. In other words, she’s got it coming.

“A 21st-century, post-#MeToo opera industry will frame Carmen as the independent feminist and Don José as the possessive villain,” explains HGO Dramaturg Jeremy Johnson, “yet the historical and cultural contexts in which Mérimée and Bizet wrote and adapted this story place the blame squarely on Carmen’s shoulders.”

Johnson has much more to share on the fascinating evolution of both Carmen the character and Carmen the opera. See page 22 for more!

THE DANCING BULL

Memorably, in Rob Ashford’s production, one of the principal dancers wears a giant bull head. The head was designed by Carmen’s original costume designer Julie Weiss and built by Houston-based artist Afsaneh Aayani, who makes masks and puppets, among other things. You’ll notice that whenever Bizet’s “Motive of Fate”
theme plays, the bull dancer is on stage, a reminder of the fate that awaits Carmen at Escamillo’s bullfight.

The centrality of the bull to Ashford’s original 2014 production can be traced to his earliest inspiration for directing and choreographing the opera. In a presentation he gave at the time, he explained where it came from:

“When I first found out I was doing Carmen, for some reason I kept being drawn to Picasso’s Guernica. That painting, which I’ve always loved, I just kept going back to it and back to it. Because it’s so beautiful, and it’s so brutal. And I really think Carmen is that. It’s so beautiful, and it’s so brutal.”

The panel of the painting with a bull and a mourning woman with a dead child in her arms reminded him of Carmen, Escamillo, and Don José, and it “really became a jumping off point to try to decide how we design the show.” Together with scenic designer David Rockwell, Ashford drew on the same events as Picasso, the Spanish Revolution and Civil War, to inform his Carmen’s more modern look.

The bull dancer from HGO’s 2014 production

Pablo Picasso, Guernica
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Did you know that fewer than 10 percent of all conductors at major opera companies are female? The opera world must evolve to be inclusive of all talented conductors meriting a spot at the podium, and HGO is doing just that with its 2021-22 season, during which half of its operas will be conducted by women, a historic first for both the company and the industry as a whole.

“I look forward to a time when it is not newsworthy that half of a season’s podium time is privileged with women,” says HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers. “HGO welcomes the richness of this moment with these brilliant maestri.”

Adding to the significance of the moment is the arrival of HGO’s first female general director, Khori Dastoor, as well as the incredible creatives who will be coming on board this season to lead HGO productions in another male-dominated role, that of director.

“I think HGO hired the best people for the projects that they’re doing,” says Omer Ben Seadia, who directs the world premiere of The Snowy Day for HGO this December. “All of the women who are working at HGO this season have excelled at their profession. They are women with incredible resumes, and unbelievable experience, and a real impact on our industry. So having them at a major opera company just makes the most sense.” Hear, hear!

*Opera Cues* spoke with five conductors and directors leading the way at HGO this season. Some broke the glass ceiling themselves; others were fortunate not to have to. All were generous enough to share their stories.
Growing up in England, Dame Jane Glover, not yet a Dame, thought she would pursue a career as an oboist. She went to the University of Oxford, where she studied music as an academic subject, but there was very little performance required as part of her degree. “Notwithstanding, we all made music all the time,” she says. “People were always putting on concerts and playing in concerts and conducting concerts and singing in concerts.”

Glover played her oboe “for all sorts of people” and sang in choirs “to a very high level.” “And then, after a bit, I started putting on concerts, and people came and played and sang for me too. And at that point, something felt familiar. And against all possible odds, I decided to try and pursue conducting. Amazing, really: I made it.”

She made that decision to pursue conducting more than 40 years ago. “You know, it really was quite lonely then,” Glover shares. “There really, really weren’t very many around then, if any. I’m the eldest, really, of the ones who are operating now. But I could not be more thrilled as to what has happened since I started because there are many, many more of us. Not enough yet, but it’s so much better than it was.”

Thinking back to the early challenges she faced, Glover recalls people writing “horribly invented things” about her. People writing about her shoes. People “looking at bits of my body and not my baton.” But she also had wonderful mentors and supporters. And, of course, her work at the podium stood for itself. Her career took off.

Somewhere in between engagements at the world’s great opera houses and appointments as Music Director of the London Mozart Players and Chicago’s Music of the Baroque, a position she still holds, Glover found the time to write. Her celebrated biography from 2005, Mozart’s Women, recounts the story of the composer’s life through the women who surrounded him.

“I write about the women that Mozart created because, actually, he writes some of the greatest roles for women that you find in opera. You have such Shakespearean complexity and depth and sophistication. And that all came from his experience of life, and he put it into his work.”

Glover is looking forward to conducting The Magic Flute at HGO, she says, “enormously,” almost two years after she was originally slated to do so, right at the pandemic’s onset. Mozart’s masterpiece is, by the way, the same opera that she conducted at the Metropolitan Opera in 2013, becoming only the third woman in that company’s history to take the podium.

“It’s just ridiculous,” she says. “I was the first woman this century. But no, I had a great time. And I have to say I’m going back to the Met this coming season, and in that season, there are five women conductors on the roster.”

Thinking back over her career, Glover says she’s sure she lost opportunities because she’s a woman, but that there likely were times when she got jobs for the same reason, because of the “new factor.” “And both of those,” she says emphatically, “are wrong. The only thing that matters, the only reason I hope people now employ me to conduct, is that they think I’ll do a decent job. The only thing that matters is the quality of the music-making.”
Omer Ben Seadia started running about six years ago, during a stint in Houston serving as assistant director for HGO’s *Madame Butterfly*. She was living out of a suitcase, on the road, going from city to city, trying to stay sane. “And so I started running,” she says, “and it saved my life. It saved my whole being. It just gave me order, and it gave me a challenge, and it was something I could do in any city.” Five years later, she ran her first marathon right here in Bayou City: the Houston Marathon.

Along the way, she became involved with a volunteer organization called Girls on the Run.

“It’s geared towards young women, children, young girls, just in a group setting, to learn how to run, but mostly to connect and to form relationships,” Ben Seadia explains. “It’s more about the challenge, less about the physical kind of feat, but setting a goal, and working together, and practicing.”

Trace Ben Seadia’s career path, and it should come as no surprise that after discovering running, she wanted to share it with others. It’s something she’s done all along.

“I was always a feminist,” Ben Seadia shares. “I was born a feminist. I come from a long line of feminists.” She grew up in Israel in a theatrical family. Her dad was a theater director, her mom studied to be an actress, and as far back as she can remember, she wanted to direct, organizing cousins and friends according to their talents, and putting on shows.

“And then, when I grew up a little bit,” she says, “I realized that I really enjoyed the ability to think deeply about the world and about society and to be able to express intellectual ideas physically on stage through creating a world that sits on stage. And I found that concept very attractive.”

She went on to find success as an opera director, first in Israel and now in the States. Joel Thompson and Andrea Davis Pinkney’s *The Snowy Day*, which makes its world premiere this December after a year-long COVID delay, is the second opera she’ll direct for HGO, after making her company directorial debut with *Tosca* in 2016 and serving as assistant director on numerous other productions.

“HGO was the first major company I worked at out of school in the U.S.,” Ben Seadia remembers. “I was so intimidated, walking into that company and into that work. But it allowed for me to sort of witness a very high level of work and high level of artistry.”

Asied if, as she’s built her career, she’s faced barriers because she’s a woman, Ben Seadia becomes thoughtful. “The thing about that is, barriers are easier to tear down when they are clearly labeled,” she says. “However, many times, it’s a more subtle kind of barrier. And sometimes it’s external, and sometimes it’s internal. And I don’t think that it was ever presented to me in a clear-cut, labeled way. I think if it was, it might have been easier to deal with.”

Now that Ben Seadia is a mature artist, she’s able to view some of the challenges she’s faced more clearly. “And,” she says, “I’m actively working to make sure that the directors who are coming up behind me have an easier go at it.”

There are the women she mentors, and “lots and lots of women” who have helped her navigate her own career. And they have formed what she calls a band. “It’s not a club,” she says, “it’s not a clique. It’s a band anyone can join at any time.”

Despite the fact that every time she walks into a rehearsal room, “I challenge the concept of what a director looks like, and is like, just by my mere presence”—and despite all she is doing to change that—Ben Seadia is clear that in itself, her being a woman is not remarkable. “I don’t think that it makes me better. I don’t think it makes me more intuitive. I don’t think it makes me special. What is special or what is extraordinary is the work, the actual work.”

And the women doing that work, she says, “should aspire to the biggest houses, the biggest companies, the biggest projects.” Ben Seadia’s band is uniting to make that happen. “We often call each other and say, ‘hey, there’s a young director here. Can you talk to her? Can you get on a phone call with her?’ And I say this to my mentees all the time: ‘Pick up the phone. Call me. Call me about the big stuff. Call me about the little stuff.’ We are here for one another. There really, really is enough room for everyone.”

“I was always a feminist. I come from a long line of feminists.”
If you want to see more talented women on the podium, here’s an idea: put them on the podium. “I started conducting when I was still a teenager,” says Lidiya Yankovskaya. “And the reason I started conducting is that somebody put me on the podium and said, ‘I think you might be good at this. You should try it.’ And it just felt right. And so I kept doing it.”

Yankovskaya is originally from St. Petersburg, Russia. Her family emigrated to the U.S. when she was 9, fleeing anti-Semitism. “I grew up with a single mom,” she explains, “and we didn’t have any money.” But her mother always thought music was essential.

“It was a special part of being a human to be trained in music and to understand music,” she says. “And so that was always a priority. Piano lessons were always provided for, musical opportunities, and I was driven as far as needed to be with the right teachers, and I was brought to concerts of a high level from before I can remember, regularly, and that was absolutely key.”

Some opportunities, though, remained out of reach. “And that’s a problem of how music education is structured in this country,” says Yankovskaya. “In Russia, where I started studying, that’s not a problem. Music education is much more accessible and holistic.”

Still, Yankovskaya was lucky that her high school in upstate New York had a massive music program and amazing teachers. She immersed herself in music, and then, all the way through undergrad and grad school, she remembers, “I kept conducting and conducting and conducting.”

Were there people who thought she should pursue a different path? Of course. “I had multiple people throughout my youth telling me that this is something I shouldn’t even be doing or shouldn’t be considering,” she remembers. Often they were other conductors, or other people studying conducting, which was hard to understand.

Some thought women might be able to conduct choruses, but never orchestras or opera. Or, Yankovskaya remembers, “sometimes there would be something very silly about the strength that’s required, which, I don’t know. Last time I checked, a baton is not very heavy. And it was absolutely absurd.”

None of that could stop someone who loved music as much as Yankovskaya did, or was as skilled on the podium. Today she is Music Director of Chicago Opera Theater, the first female in the role, known for championing lesser-known Russian masterpieces and contemporary works. She is also the founder of the Refuge Orchestra Project and has performed as a guest conductor with companies across the country. Carmen marks her much-anticipated HGO debut.

Yankovskaya is incredibly busy, of course, but she makes time to mentor young artists—“women and men and people of all backgrounds”—to foster more voices in opera, pass on the wisdom she’s gained, move the art form forward, and pay forward what her own beloved mentors have done for her, both before and after she launched her career.

“I conduct because there were also so many people who saw something in me and encouraged me,” she says, “be it my high school teachers, and conductors of the youth ensembles in which I played, and my piano teachers, my violin teacher, the people who said ‘you should really do this, you should try this, and here are some ideas, and here’s how you can take it on.’”
Eun Sun Kim’s history with HGO has been eventful, to say the least. It can be traced back to 2014, when HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers saw her conduct in Vienna and was entranced by her extraordinary talents. He invited her to make her American debut with HGO in fall 2017—with no idea of the disruption to come from Hurricane Harvey, which would flood HGO out of its home at the Wortham only a few short weeks before Kim was set to conduct La traviata.

In the end, Kim made her debut conducting the opera at Resilience Theatre in the George R. Brown Convention Center, where HGO would stage its entire 2017-18 season. And she was a spectacular success: the New York Times, reviewing the production, called her “a major star.” Following that triumph, HGO named Kim its first principal guest conductor in 25 years, an appointment that would see her conduct one opera per year with the company starting during the 2019-20 season.

Her next engagement with HGO was for Strauss’s Salome—scheduled for April 2020, shortly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was, of course, canceled. “I was disappointed, of course, but c’est la vie,” Kim shares. “You really can’t predict anything in life!” Having my debut after Harvey and then these cancellations during the pandemic only strengthened my ties with HGO.”

During the alternative 2020-21 HGO Digital season, she instead conducted Mozart’s The Impresario, released in fall 2020.

Now, barring a new catastrophe, audiences will finally see Kim conduct the HGO Orchestra for a mainstage production at the company’s home theater this spring. “I am very much looking forward to being in the pit at the Wortham,” she says. “Even more so after having the experience of working ‘in’ the Wortham during The Impresario. That was a short period of time, but a truly joyful one!”

Kim is originally from Korea, where she started playing piano at age 4. She took up conducting while studying composition in Seoul, after one of her teachers encouraged her to try it. In 2008, Kim won first prize in the Lopez Cobos International Opera Conductors Competition; she was already a favorite in Europe when she made her American debut with HGO. After that, her star continued to rise and rise, and at the end of 2019 she made history—and headline after headline—as not only the first woman music director of San Francisco Opera (SFO), but the first woman music director, period, of an opera company of its budget, size, and prestige.

It’s clear that for Kim, laser focused as she is on making music, all the attention paid to her gender can be distracting. Asked whether she looks forward to a day when women conducting half of all the operas in a given season, at a company like HGO, is no longer noteworthy, she says, “the quantity matters much less to me than the quality. When excellent musicians can get fair opportunities regardless of their gender, I think we are headed in the right direction!”

Still, she knows she’s inspired other women, and defied antiquated expectations of what a conductor should look like, not only with her gender but her age. As she told the San Francisco Chronicle around the time of her appointment at SFO, there have been occasions when she’s walked into the pit and felt musicians regarding her “as if I were a violinist arriving late to the performance. But then I give my downbeat and we go ahead.”

An interview she gave the New York Times is also illuminating. She shared that her barrier-breaking Korean grandmother, a doctor, was long described as a “female doctor” instead of just a “doctor,” although that changed within her lifetime. “So I’m grateful to be the first ‘female music director,’” Kim told the paper. “But I also look forward to a future where the next generation will be called just ‘conductor.’”
Francesca Zambello’s incredible career as a director has unfolded over decades, on the stages of opera and theater companies around the world. And a key turning point took place right here in Houston, with her 1984 American debut, after HGO’s then General Director David Gockley asked her to direct Fidelio, in a production starring Hildegard Behrens, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas.

“The set was all set in a prison made of chain link fences with just a staircase that rolled around between the fences, a surveillance bridge, and a Jeep,” she remembers. “At that time, doing something outside the norm was considered so novel and so different, yet now this is standard thinking! ... For me, it was one of my first great directing experiences, and so pivotal in launching me to other productions in other countries and theaters.”

But Zambello’s path to success wasn’t always easy. “There were many roadblocks along the way,” she shares. “There were many people who did not want to hire me, nor did they want to help me. I was the only woman in the room on countless productions. Often there were encounters that were unpleasant and sexist. I would be lying if I said these experiences did not happen.”

She remembers a time when she was sharing a production office with eight men—and one toilet. “One of the men said to me, ‘Don’t think because you are here, we are going to put the seat down.’” But despite such brutal experiences, Zambello adds, she was fortunate that “there were some people, like David Gockley, who believed in me and my directing skills and artistic leadership, who engaged me.”

And when barriers went up, Zambello found ways to overcome them. “I always thought just be yourself, just create an atmosphere among people that is harmonious, loving, and collaborative. And that often became the solution.”

Now general and artistic director of Glimmerglass Festival and artistic director of Washington National Opera, Zambello makes a point of hiring and mentoring other women directors. Asked if she’s happy progress has been made toward parity in the industry, she says, “Yes, but it is still slow-going, and we also need to focus more on diversity.”

Of course, through the mere fact of its existence, Zambello’s own career has cut a path for others. Omer Ben Seadia, director of The Snowy Day this season for HGO, told Opera Cues, “Luckily, because of women like Francesca Zambello, because of the generation above me, I’m not the first one to walk into the room.” Hearing of this, Zambello said, “I’m very pleased that my accomplishments and sometimes challenges have paved the way for other female directors to be able to more easily find acceptance and validation.”

Since her long-ago debut with HGO, Zambello has returned to Houston to direct 22 times—23 counting the opera she leads here this season, Dialogues of the Carmelites, which, Zambello says, she never tires of directing. “At the very core, this is a simple and powerful tale of these women who hold on to their beliefs,” she shares. “It is a lesson in the power of the human spirit against evil. The lesson never gets tired. It never loses feeling like a contemporary story.”

“Francesca Zambello
Director, Poulenc’s
Dialogues of the Carmelites

“There were many people who did not want to hire me, nor did they want to help me. I was the only woman in the room on countless productions.”
2021–2022
HOUSTON GRAND OPERA

FALL PRODUCTION FUNDERS

CARMEN

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The company debut of Lidiya Yankovskaya was partially supported by OPERA America’s Opera Grants for Women Stage Directors and Conductors, generously funded by the Marineau Family Foundation.
An Opera in Four Acts
Music by Georges Bizet | Libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy

Sung in French with projected English translation

Oct. 26 performance is High School Night
† Alternate cast

BROWN THEATER, WORTHAM THEATER CENTER

The performance lasts approximately 2 hours and 55 minutes, including one intermission.

A Co-Production with Lyric Opera of Chicago

The activities of Houston Grand Opera are supported in part by funds provided by the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance and by a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts.
Story in a Nutshell:

Love, lust, jealousy, and death—Carmen has all the elements to make it one of the most popular operas in the world. Set in Seville around the year 1830, the opera follows the story of a defiant young woman, Carmen, and the men who become obsessed with her. The opera opens in the town square, where soldiers are guarding the cigarette factory. The workers from the factory file out, and one woman captures everyone’s attention through her beauty and assertive nature. Don José becomes infatuated with Carmen and is lured away from his duty as a soldier and his girlfriend Micaela. After an incident at the factory, Carmen is brought into military custody, where Don José eventually allows her to escape, furthering his obsession with her.

When the bullfighter Escamillo arrives in town, tensions arise between him and Don José. Refusing to lose the love of his life, Don José joins the group of revolutionaries that Carmen is associated with, but his wild jealousy continues to drive a wedge between the two. It becomes clear that Carmen is pulling away from Don José, and his obsession with her intensifies after she tells him to return home to Micaela. In the last act, outside of the bullfighting ring, Don José realizes he can never control Carmen. And if he cannot have her, no one can.

What to Listen For

From *The Muppet Show* to Pixar’s *UP*, the Olympics to a Pepsi-centric rendition featuring Beyoncé, the music from Bizet’s *Carmen* can be found all throughout pop culture. In fact, the title character’s “Habanera” and Escamillo’s “Toreador Song” both appear in movies, TV shows, and at sporting events so frequently, each has its own Wikipedia page.

**Habanera**: One of the most famous arias in the world, the “Habanera” is performed by the sultry title character in Act I. The aria’s score was adapted from the habanera “El Anegligio ou la Promesse de mariage” by Spanish musician Sebastián Yradier, which Bizet incorrectly thought was a folk song. Although the opera’s libretto was written by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, Bizet wrote the aria’s lyrics. The composer rewrote the aria multiple times with the help of the original Carmen, mezzo-soprano Célestine Galli-Marié.

**The Toreador Song (original name: Votre toast, je peux vous le rendre)**: While trying to impress Carmen, Escamillo performs “The Toreador Song” in Act II. The aria is built on a descending chromatic scale in the verses and a triumphant, bombastic refrain as Escamillo describes the bullfighting ring, singing “Toréador, en garde!”

Fun Fact

*Carmen*’s premiere was one of the most famous flops of all time. Bizet, who considered this show to be his masterpiece, died three months after its infamous debut, never knowing that *Carmen* would go on to become one of the most loved and performed operas in the world.

Everybody Dance Now

Tony-winning director/dancemaker Rob Ashford has a background in choreographing Broadway musicals including *Thoroughly Modern Millie* and *Evita*, among many others. This production’s dance numbers are truly special, telling the opera’s story in the background. During the opera’s musical interludes, the principal dancers’ movements mirror what the characters are going through.
CAST & CREATIVE

CAST (in order of vocal appearance)

Morales
- Blake Denson **
  Gloria M. Portela and Richard
  E. Evans/ Carolyn J. Levy/Liz Grimm
  and Jack Roth Fellow

Micaela
- Heidi Stober #

Zuniga
- William Guanbo Su **
  Anne and Albert Chao Fellow

Don José
- Richard Trey Smagur #
  Scott Quinn # †

Carmen
- Carolyn Sproule #
  Sarah Mesko †

Frasquita
- Raven McMillon **
  Kathleen Moore and Steven Homer/
  Nancy Haywood Fellow

Mercedes
- Sun-Ly Pierce **
  Mr. and Mrs. Charles G. Nickson/
  John Serpe and Tracy Maddox Fellow

Escamillo
- Christian Pursell *

El Dancairo
- Luke Sutliff * **
  Lynn Giessel/
  Brenda Harvey-Traylor Fellow

El Remendado
- Ricardo Garcia **
  Dr. Ellen R. Gritz and Mr. Milton
  D. Rosenau Jr./Michelle Beale and
  Dick Anderson Fellow

The Bull
- Peter John Chursin *
  Marty Lawson

The Matador
- Mike Baerga *

Solo Dancers
- Tislarm Bouie *
- Kenny Corrigan *
- Marc Heitzman *
- Cajai Fellows Johnson *
- Robin Masella *
- Brittany Marcell Monachino *
- Waldemar Quiñones-Villanueva
- Mariah Reshea Reives *
- Allison Walsh *
- Shannon Weir *

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor
- Lidiya Yankovskaya *
  Benjamin Manis †
  Rob Ashford

Director / Choreographer
- Stephen Sposito *
  David Rockwell

Associate Director
- Julie Weiss
  Donald Holder

Set Designer
- Michael James Clark
  Ashley Elizabeth Hale *
  Marty Lawson

Original Costume Designer
- Anne and Albert Chao Fellow

Lighting Designer
- Julie Weiss
  Donald Holder

Associate Lighting Designer
- Michael James Clark
  Ashley Elizabeth Hale *
  Marty Lawson

Associate Choreographer
- Adam Noble

Dance Captain
- Richard Bado #
  Sarah and Ernest Butler
  Chorus Master Chair

Intimacy and Fight Director
- Patricia Kristof Moy *
  Peter Pasztor #
  Madeleine Slettedahl *
  Alex Munger **

Chorus Master
- Gary Hollingsworth and Ken Hyde/
  Trey Yates/Dr. Saul and
  Ursula Balagura Fellow
  Alexander Soloway *
  Annie Wheeler

FRENCH DICTON COACH
- Patricia Kristof Moy *

MUSICAL PREPARATION
- Peter Pasztor #
  Madeleine Slettedahl *
  Alex Munger **

STAGE MANAGER
- Gary Hollingsworth and Ken Hyde/
  Trey Yates/Dr. Saul and
  Ursula Balagura Fellow
  Alexander Soloway *

PRODUCTION CREDITS

English Supertitles by Scott F. Heumann, adapted by Jeremy Johnson. Supertitles called by Emily Kern.

Performing artists, stage directors, and choreographers are represented by the American Guild of Musical Artists, the union for opera professionals in the United States.

Orchestral musicians are represented by the Houston Professional Musicians Association, Local #65-699, American Federation of Musicians.

Stage crew personnel provided by IATSE, Local #51.

Wardrobe personnel provided by Theatrical Wardrobe Union, Local #896.

This production is being recorded for archival purposes.
SYNOPSIS

ACT I

In a town square in Seville, Spain, soldiers guarding the cigarette factory idly watch the passersby. Micaela, a young country girl, enters the square in search of one of the soldiers, Don José. Led by an officer, Morales, the soldiers surround her and try to detain her, but Micaela flees. Afterward, José’s military unit arrives. At noon, the young men of the town gather to watch the women as they come out of the cigarette factory on a break from work. One of the women, Carmen, tells her friends that love is “a wild bird that cannot be imprisoned.” Before returning to work, she flirtatiously tosses a flower at Don José. Micaela returns, this time with a letter from José’s mother. José resolves to honor his mother’s wishes by marrying Micaela. Suddenly, screams are heard from the factory: Carmen has been involved in a fight and has slashed another woman’s face. While Lieutenant Zuniga drafts the order for her imprisonment, she is put into José’s custody. Carmen persuades him to let her escape by promising a future rendezvous.

ACT II

At Lillas Pastia’s inn, Carmen and two friends, Frasquita and Mercedes, sing of their life as Romani wanderers. Zuniga tells Carmen that José was thrown in prison for allowing her to escape, but that he has just been released. The bullfighter Escamillo arrives with his entourage and asks Carmen if she will ever love him. El Dancairo and El Remendado, two revolutionaries, try to convince Carmen and her friends to accompany them on their next mission, but Carmen refuses, saying she is in love with José and is awaiting his return. When José arrives, Carmen sings and dances for him, but a distant bugle sounds and he says he must return to the barracks immediately. She invites him to desert the army and join the revolutionaries, but he refuses, and Carmen mocks his cowardice. As he is leaving, José encounters Zuniga, who has come in hopes of seeing Carmen. The jealous José strikes his superior officer. Now an outlaw, he has no choice but to desert the army and join Carmen and her friends.

INTERMISSION

ACT III

The revolutionaries are busy moving their goods through the dangerous hillside. Carmen, now tired of José’s jealousy, reads her fortune in the playing cards. She draws the card of death. When the revolutionaries head down the mountain to bribe the customs officer, José is left as a lookout. On her way up the mountain to find José, Micaela hears a rifle shot and takes cover. José has fired a warning shot at Escamillo, who has come in search of Carmen. Escamillo tells José he is in love with Carmen; they start to fight but are separated by the returning gang. Remendado then discovers Micaela, who has come to beg José to return home to his dying mother. Carmen urges him to leave; José is convinced she wants to be rid of him in order to be with Escamillo. José leaves with Micaela, warning Carmen that he will come back.

ACT IV

An excited crowd gathers for the bullfight. Outside the ring, Frasquita and Mercedes pull Carmen aside and tell her to be careful because José has been seen in the crowd. Carmen, however, ignores their warnings and bravely remains for a final encounter. José pleads desperately with her to come back to him. As she tells him she can never love him again, the crowd is heard cheering Escamillo’s victory in the ring. Realizing that he can never possess Carmen, José stabs her to death.

PERFORMANCE HISTORY

Carmen was last staged at Houston Grand Opera during the 2013-14 season; prior to that, it was seen in seasons 2005-06, 2000-01, 1994-95, 1988-89, 1980-81, 1971-72, 1967-68, and 1959-60. In addition, it was seen on HGO’s Multimedia Modular Stage in 2001 and 1998, was performed by Texas Opera Theater during the 1985-86 season, and was part of the 1974 Spring Opera Festival.
HGO ORCHESTRA

Patrick Summers, Artistic and Music Director
Sarah and Ernest Butler Chair

VIOLIN
Denise Tarrant*, Concertmaster
Sarah and Ernest Butler Concertmaster Chair
Chloe Kim*, Assistant Concertmaster
Natalie Gaynor*, Principal, Second Violin
Carrie Kau†, Assistant Principal
Second Violin
Mary Reed*, Acting Assistant Principal
Second Violin
Miriam Belyatsky*
Anabel Detrick*
Rasa Kalesnykaité†
Hae-a Lee-Barnes*
Chavdar Parashkevov†
Erica Robinson*
Linda Sanders*
Oleg Sulyga*
Sylvia VerMeulen*
Melissa Williams*
Zubaida Azezi
Eugeni Cheremoush
Andres Eduardo Gonzalez
Kana Kimura
Maria Lin
Emily Madonia
Mila Neal
Sylvia Ouelette
Rachel Shepard
Trung Trinh

VIOLA
Eliseo Rene Salazar*, Principal
Lorento Golofeev*, Assistant Principal
Gayle Garcia-Shepard*
Erika C. Lawson*
Suzanne LeFevre†
Dawson White*
Gabrielle Glass
Elizabeth Golofeev
Sergein Yap

CELLO
Barrett Sills*, Principal
Erika Johnson*, Assistant Principal
Ariana Nelson†
Wendy Smith-Butler†
Steven Wiggs*
Steve Estes
Shino Hayashi
Hyeok Kwon

DOUBLE BASS
Dennis Whittaker†, Principal
Erik Gronfor*, Acting Principal
Carla Clark*, Acting Assistant Principal
Deborah Dunham
Paul Ellison

FLUTE
Henry Williford*, Acting Principal Flute
Izumi Miyahara

OBOE
Elizabeth Priestly Siffert†, Principal
Mayu Isom*
Virginia McDowell, Acting Principal

CLARINET
Sean Krissman*, Principal
Eric Chi*

BASSOON
Amanda Swain*, Principal
Michael Allard*

FRENCH HORN
Sarah Cranston*, Principal
Kimberly Penrod Minson*
Spencer Park†
Kevin McIntyre
Gavin Reed

TRUMPET
Tetsuya Lawson*, Principal
Randal Adams*

TROMBONE
Thomas Hulten*, Principal
Mark Holley†
Ben Osborne
Ryan Rongone

TUBA
Mark Barton†, Principal

HARP
Joan Eidman*, Principal

TIMPANI
Alison Chang*, Principal

PERCUSSION
Richard Brown*, Principal
Christina Carroll
Karen Slotter

ON-STAGE TRUMPET
Gerardo Mata

ORCHESTRA PERSONNEL MANAGER
Richard Brown*

*HGO Orchestra core musician
†HGO Orchestra core musician on leave this production
HGO CHORUS

Richard Bado, Chorus Master
Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair

Nathan Abbott
Hayley Abramowitz
Ofelia Adame
Preston Andrews
Maggie Armand
Dennis Arrowsmith
Sarah Bannon
Zachary Barba
Alyssa Barnes
Megan Berti
Leslie Biffle
Steve Buza
Christopher Childress
Patrick Contreras
Esteban Cordero
Calie Denbigh
Stacia Dunn
Ami Figg
Don Figg
Maurice Goodwin
Dallas Gray
Evelyn Grayson
Nancy Hall
Sarah Hardin
Frankie Hickman
Austin Hoeltzel
Julie Hoeltzel
Joe Key
Brianne Kollmorgen
Michael Kollmorgen
Melissa Krueger
Wesley Landry
Aarianna Longino
Alejandro Magallón
Kathy Manley
Neal Martinez
Norman Mathews
Byron Mayes
Katherine McDaniel
Jeff Monette
Natasha Monette
Patrick Perez
Abby Powell
Said Pressley
Teresa Procter
Nicholas Rathgeb
Gabrielle Reed
Kendall Reimer
Francis Rivera
Hannah Roberts
Emily Robinson
Michael Rodriguez
Kathleen Ruhleder
Johnny Salvesen
Christina Scanlan
Valerie Serice
Kade Smith
John Weinel
Jennifer Wright
Chloe Zimmermann
WHO'S WHO

LIDIYA YANKOVSKAYA
(RUSSIA)
CONDUCTOR

Russian-American conductor Lidiya Yankovskaya is a fiercely committed advocate for Russian masterpieces, operatic rarities, and contemporary works on the leading edge of classical music. Carmen marks her debut with HGO. As Music Director of Chicago Opera Theater, Yankovskaya has led the Chicago premieres of Jake Heggie’s Moby-Dick, Rachmaninov’s Aleko, Joby Talbot’s Everest, Tchaikovsky’s Iolanta, and the world premiere of Dan Shore’s Freedom Ride. Elsewhere, she has recently conducted Don Giovanni at Seattle Opera, Pia de’ Tolomei at Spoleto Festival USA, The Barber of Seville at Wolf Trap Opera, Ellen West at New York’s Prototype Festival, and the world premiere of Taking Up Serpents at Washington National Opera. On the concert stage, she has been recently engaged with Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Hawaii Symphony, Chicago Philharmonic, Rhode Island Philharmonic, and the symphony orchestras of Mobile and Oviedo, Spain. An alumna of the Dallas Opera’s Hart Institute for Women Conductors and recipient of the Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship, Yankovskaya has also served as assistant conductor to Lorin Maazel, assisted Vladimir Jurowski via a London Philharmonic fellowship, and was featured in the Bruno Walter National Conductor Preview. Upcoming debuts include Dallas Opera, Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Opera, and Opera Seville.

BENJAMIN MANIS
(UNITED STATES)
CONDUCTOR
(OCT. 26 AND NOV. 6)

Conductor Benjamin Manis joined HGO as Resident Conductor in September 2019. This season with HGO, he will also conduct performances of Romeo and Juliet and The Snowy Day. Recent performances at HGO include Rigoletto, El Milagro del Recuerdo, the 2020 world premiere of Marian’s Song, and the subsequent HGO Digital filmed version and Miller Outdoor Theatre performances of the same work. Manis has served as cover conductor for the St. Louis and Dallas Symphonies, working with conductors David Robertson and Stéphane Denève, and was a winner of the 2019 Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Award. Winner of the Aspen Conducting Prize, he returned to the Aspen Music Festival in summer 2021 for the fourth consecutive year. Manis has a Master of Music degree from Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music, where he studied with Larry Rachleff.

ROB ASHFORD
(UNITED STATES)
DIRECTOR/CHOREOGRAPHER

Rob Ashford is a Tony Award, Olivier Award, Emmy Award, Drama Desk Award, and Outer Critics Circle Award winning director and choreographer. Previously for HGO, he directed and choreographed Carmen (2014) and Carousel (2016). Ashford’s Broadway theater credits include Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Frozen, The Boys from Syracuse, Evita, How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying, Promises, Thoroughly Modern Millie, Shrek, John Waters’ Cry-Baby, Curtains, and The Wedding Singer. Other credits include The Entertainer, Romeo and Juliet, The Winter’s Tale, Harlequinade, Macbeth, the Olivier Award winning productions of Anna Christie, A Streetcar Named Desire, and Parade. Ashford directed and choreographed Peter Pan Live! and The Sound of Music Live! for NBC, and directed The Barber of Seville and Carousel. He choreographed and staged the 2015, 2014, 2013, and 2009 Academy Awards. He won the Emmy for Best Choreography for his work on Baz Luhrmann’s 2009 Academy Awards production number featuring Hugh Jackman and Beyoncé. Ashford has staged the Tony Awards for eight years, and has also staged tributes at the Kennedy Center Honors for Barbra Streisand, Andrew Lloyd Webber, Jerry Herman, Barbara Cook, Tom Hanks, Shirley MacLaine, and Meryl Streep. Films include choreography for Beyond the Sea, Disney’s Cinderella, A Million Ways to Die in the West, Ted 2, and Murder on the Orient Express. Upcoming, he will direct Glenn Close in the highly anticipated musical remake of Paramount’s Sunset Boulevard.

STEPHEN SPOSITO
(UNITED STATES)
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Stephen Sposito is a New York City-based director. He has served as the associate director for The Book of Mormon, where he oversaw the Broadway, touring, and Australia companies. He previously served as the resident director for the Broadway and touring productions of Wicked. Directing credits include the national tour of Shrek the Musical, Pippin at Pittsburgh Playhouse, Crossroads for Regents Seven Seas, Something Rotten at Cape Rep Theatre, The American Theatre Wing Gala, and The Obie Awards. Associate director credits include the Broadway companies of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof starring Scarlett Johansson, How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying starring Daniel Radcliffe, Promises, Promises starring Sean Hayes and Kristin Chenoweth, Scandalous, and Shrek the Musical. He is a graduate of The University of Michigan.
DAVID ROCKWELL  
(UNITED STATES)  
SET DESIGNER

David Rockwell served as set designer for HGO’s new production of Carmen (2014). His Broadway credits include Kiss Me Kate, Lobby Hero, She Loves Me (Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle awards), On the Twentieth Century (Tony nomination), You Can’t Take It with You (Tony nomination), Kinky Boots (Tony nomination), Lucky Guy (Tony nomination), Hairspray (Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle nominations). His Off-Broadway credits include The Seven Deadly Sins, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Soundtrack of America, and the Public Theater’s Shakespeare in the Park. Film and television credits include Team America and the 81st, 82nd, and 93rd Oscars (2010 Emmy Award). Rockwell is the Founder and President of Rockwell Group, offices in Los Angeles and Madrid, and the author of four books on architecture and design, including Drama (Phaidon 2021). His honors include the AIANY President’s Award, a Cooper Hewitt National Design Award, and the Presidential Design Award.

JULIE WEISS  
(UNITED STATES)  
ORIGINAL COSTUME DESIGNER

Julie Weiss holds credits in film, television, theater, and opera and has served on faculty at UCLA and Stanford. She has twice been honored with an Academy Award® nomination for Best Costume Design, for her work on Terry Gilliam’s sci-fi thriller 12 Monkeys and Julie Taymor’s biographical drama Frida, for which Weiss was also nominated for a BAFTA Award and Costume Designers Guild (CDG) Award. Additionally, she received CDG Awards for her work on the Oscar®-winning Best Picture American Beauty and, more recently, the ice-skating comedy hit Blades of Glory. She received the Career Achievement Award from the Costume Designers Guild in both film and television. Weiss’s recent credits include Greyhound starring Tom Hanks and directed by Aaron Schneider, Hitchcock starring Anthony Hopkins and directed by Sacha Gervasi, the thriller Get Low with Robert Duvall, the period romantic drama Shanghai, the historical ensemble dramas Bobby and Hollywoodland, and the comedy remake Fun with Dick and Jane. A two-time Emmy winner and seven-time nominee, Weiss received Emmy and CDG Award nominations for the HBO movie Mrs. Harris starring Annette Bening. She won Emmy Awards for her work on the miniseries A Woman of Independent Means starring Sally Field, and the telefilm The Dollmaker starring Jane Fonda. Among her Broadway credits, Weiss received a Tony Award nomination for her costume designs in the original production of The Elephant Man. She has designed Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, directed by Rob Aschford and featuring Scarlett Johansson; and Ann, directed by Benjamin Endsley Klein, featuring Holland Taylor. She also has designed numerous productions for Artistic Director Gordon Davidson at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, and Destiny of Desire, directed by Jose Luis Valenzuela of the Latino Theater Company of Los Angeles. Weiss received a Helen Hayes Award for Best Costumes on Destiny of Desire at the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C.

DONALD HOLDER  
(UNITED STATES)  
LIGHTING DESIGNER

Previously for HGO, Donald Holder served as lighting designer for The End of the Affair (2004) and Carmen (2014). Other opera credits include Porgy and Bess, Otello, Samson et Delilah, Two Boys, The Magic Flute, and Rigoletto for the Metropolitan Opera; Death and the Powers and Moby-Dick at the Dallas Opera; and many others. For Broadway, Holder has designed lighting for 58 productions and garnered 13 Tony award nominations, winning the Tony for Best Lighting Design for The Lion King (1998) and the 2008 revival of South Pacific. His projects include Tootsie; Anastasia; the revivals of Kiss Me, Kate, My Fair Lady, Fiddler on the Roof, She Loves Me, The King and I, On the Twentieth Century, and You Can’t Take It with You; as well as Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark, The Father, Bullets Over Broadway, The Bridges of Madison County, Golden Boy, Come Fly Away, Ragtime, Movin’ Out, and many others. His film work includes Oceans 8; television projects include The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel and seasons one and two of Smash. Holder has a Master of Fine Arts from the Yale School of Drama and serves as Associate Professor and Head of Lighting Design at the Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University.

MICHAEL JAMES CLARK  
(UNITED STATES)  
ASSOCIATE LIGHTING DESIGNER

Michael James Clark is the lighting supervisor for HGO. During the 2020-21 HGO Digital season, he designed lighting for a number of Live from The Cullen performances, the HGO Studio Showcase and Holiday Celebration, Giving Voice, and The Impressario. He served as revival lighting designer for Aida in 2020. During HGO’s 2018-19 season he designed lighting for HGO’s production of La bohème for performances on the mainstage and at Miller Outdoor Theatre, and for...
Ashley Elizabeth Hale was born in Chicago and raised in Scotland. She trained at the Dance School of Scotland and Laine Theatre Arts. Most recently Hale was dance and direction supervisor for the relaunch of Disney’s Frozen tour in the United States. On Broadway, Hale was part of the original cast of Frozen and also in Matilda, understudying and playing Miss Honey. In London’s West End she appeared in Shrek, Jersey Boys, On the Town, Candide, Dirty Dancing, Fame, and Guys and Dolls. Worldwide credits include performing principal roles in Mamma Mial, Starlight Express, Saturday Night Fever, and the NBA All-Star game at Madison Square Garden. On screen, Hale can be seen in Disney’s Cinderella, Ted 2, Saturday Night Live, the Kennedy Centre Honors, and the Tony Awards. She appears on the original Broadway cast recording of Frozen and is also a voiceover artist. She served as ballet mistress in Carmen at the Lyric.

Marty Lawson has been living in New York City and performing for Broadway, film, and television for the last 20 years. Winner of a Princess Grace Award, Outer Critics Circle Award, and a Chita Rivera Award for his work in dance and theater, Lawson has appeared in over 70 productions for film and TV, most recently on The Blacklist and FBI: Most Wanted. He has been a cast member of seven Broadway shows starting with his debut performing the lead role of Eddie in Twyla Tharp’s Movin’ Out. Others credits include The Times They Are A-Changin’, Cry Baby, Shrek, Promises, Promises, and How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying. Most recently he could be found commanding a one-ton puppet of King Kong for its Special Tony Award for achievement in theater.

Adam Noble is a movement specialist with over 25 years of experience in theater, opera, and film. He is the Movement Instructor for the HGO Studio, and previously served as the company’s Fight Director for Julius Caesar (2018) and the Fight and Intimacy Director for Don Giovanni (2019). Notable credits include The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, The Alley Theatre, Opera Carolina, Lincoln Center Director’s Lab, Dayton Opera, the Public Theatre, and more. Noble is the co-founder and artistic director of the Dynamic Presence Project, a theater company focused on the revitalization and proliferation of movement theater and embodied physical storytelling. He teaches movement both nationally and internationally, and has choreographed the physicality, violence, and intimacy for well over 200 productions. As the Associate Professor of Acting & Movement at the University of Houston, he serves both the MFA and the BFA acting programs. He is also the resident Fight Director & Intimacy Coordinator for The Alley Theatre.

HGO Studio alumnus Richard Bado is director of artistic operations and chorus master at HGO. He made his professional conducting debut in 1989 leading HGO’s acclaimed production of Show Boat at the newly restored Cairo Opera House in Egypt. Since then, he has conducted for Houston Ballet, La Scala, Opéra national de Paris, New York City Opera, the Aspen Music Festival, Tulsa Opera, the Russian National Orchestra, the Florida Philharmonic, the Montreal Symphony, and Wolf Trap Opera. He will be conducting performances of The Nutcracker this season with the Houston Ballet. An accomplished pianist, Bado appears regularly with Renée Fleming in recital. He has also played for Cecilia Bartoli, Frederica von Stade, Susan Graham, Denyce Graves, Marcello Giordani, Ramón Vargas, Samuel Ramey, Jamie Barton, Ryan McKinny, and Nathan Gunn. Bado holds music degrees from the Eastman School of Music, where he received the 2000 Alumni Achievement Award, and West Virginia University; he also studied advanced choral conducting with Robert Shaw. For 12 years, he was the director of the opera studies program at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music. He has served on the faculty of the Aspen Music Festival and School, the Dolora Zajick Institute for Young Dramatic Voices, the International Vocal School in Moscow, and the Texas Music Festival. He received HGO's Silver Rose Award in 2013 in celebration of his 25th year as chorus master.
Carolyn Sproule is a winner of a 2019 George London Award, the Marcello Giordani Memorial Prize in the 2019 Premiere Opera Foundation Competition, and a recipient of career grants from several opera foundations. She is an alumna of the HGO Studio. Previous roles with HGO include Third Lady in The Magic Flute, Vlasta in the American premiere of The Passenger, and Maddalena in Rigoletto. This season she also performs the title role in Carmen with Opera Hong Kong and Savonlinna Opera. Future engagements include appearances at Aix-en-Provence Festival, San Diego Opera, Novaya Opera in Moscow, and the Metropolitan Opera. Sproule made her European operatic debut singing Erika in Vanessa at the Wexford Festival. She has sung Maddalena in Rigoletto for Canadian Opera Company, as well as at Vancouver Opera and Opéra de Montréal. She has sung Olga in Eugene Onegin in Vancouver, Montreal, and for her Michigan Opera Theater debut, and returned to the Canadian Opera Company as Emilia in Otello. Sproule debuted at The Metropolitan Opera in 2015 as the Sandman in Hansel and Gretel and has returned there to sing the Page in Salome and Inez in Il trovatore. She has also been on the Metropolitan Opera roster for productions of Falstaff, Otello, Thais, Eugene Onegin, The Marriage of Figaro, The Death of Klinghoffer, Manon, Cavalleria Rusticana, Pique Dame, and The Magic Flute. Past performances of note include her debut as Dorabella in Così fan tutte at the Metropolitan Opera and then at English National Opera; the title role in Carmen with Pacific Opera Victoria; and the alto soloist in Handel’s Messiah at the National Arts Centre. She is a graduate of The Juilliard School (Bachelor of Music, 2010), and Rice University (Master of Music, 2012). In addition to the HGO Studio, she trained with Merola Opera Program, Wolf Trap Opera (Filene Young Artist), and others.

American mezzo-soprano Sarah Mesko is garnering attention for her “rich mezzo soprano” (The Washington Post) voice and musicality. Previously with HGO, she performed Mrs. Segstrom in A Little Night Music. Recent performances include a debut at Tulsa Opera for the title role in Carmen; The Metropolitan Opera in Semiramide (Arsace), Carmen (Mercédès), and covering the title role in Agrippina; as well as her Canadian debut in Le comte Ory (Isolier) with Edmonton Opera. On the concert stage, she appeared in Handel’s Messiah at the US Naval Academy and presented recitals at the University of Arkansas and Hendrix College. She has appeared in the houses of Washington National Opera, San Francisco Opera, Cincinnati Opera, The Glimmerglass Festival, Annapolis Opera, Théâtre de Gennevilliers, and the stages of the New York Philharmonic, National Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, and Columbus Symphony Orchestra. She will return to The Metropolitan Opera and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis in the 2021-2022 season.

American tenor Richard Trey Smagur, an HGO Studio alumnus, is the winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 2017. His past roles at HGO include the Steersman in The Flying Dutchman, Parpignol in La bohème, Gastone de Lettorières in La traviata, Young Servant in Elektra, and Count Almaviva in outdoor performances of The Barber of Seville. During HGO Digital’s inaugural season, he performed the role of The Witch in Hansel and Gretel. In the 2021-22 season, he makes his house debut at the Metropolitan Opera as the First Armored Man in The Magic Flute and returns later in the season as Young Servant in Elektra. Last season, he joined Atlanta Opera as Don José in the world premiere of The Threepenny Carmen, directed by Tomer Zvulun. Highlights of recent seasons include his role debut as Števa in David Alden’s production of Jenůfa at Santa Fe Opera, his role debut as Narraboth in Salome in concert with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of Fabio Luisi, and a performance of Schumann’s Dichterliebe at Houston Symphony’s Schumann Festival. A native of Clarkesville, Georgia, Smagur holds a Performer’s Diploma from Indiana University and Bachelor of Music degree from Shorter College. He was a fellow at the Steans Music Institute at Ravinia Music Festival.
Carolina Opera for Rodolfo in *La bohème*. Last season, Quinn joined San Antonio Opera for Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. His recent credits include Elemer in *Arabella* and Štěva in *Jeníčka* (San Francisco Opera); Duca in *Rigoletto* (San Diego Opera, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Atlanta Opera); Cavaradossi in *Tosca* (North Carolina Opera); Don José in *Carmen* and Boris in *Káťa Kabanová* (Seattle Opera); Rodolfo in *La bohème* (Utah Opera, Minnesota Opera); Alfredo in *La traviata* (Austin Opera); Camille in *The Merry Widow* and Oscar in the American premiere of Gareth Williams’s *Rocking Horse Winner* (Opera Saratoga); Fritz in *L’amico Fritz* (Den Jyske Opera); Don José in *Káťa Kabanová* (North Carolina Opera); and Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* (Palm Beach Opera).

**CHRISTIAN PURSELL**
(UNITED STATES)
BASS-BARITONE—ESCAMILLO

*Carmen* marks Christian Pursell’s main-stage debut with HGO; under the auspices of HGOco, he performed the role of Tom in Laura Kaminsky’s *Some Light Emerges*. This season Pursell also appears as Escamilo at the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and Hawaii Opera Theatre. His 2019-20 highlights included Lieutenant Ratcliffe in *Billy Budd* at the San Francisco Opera and semi-staged performances of *Salome* with Fabio Luisi at the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. Other recent engagements have included Samuel in Handel’s *Saul* at Walt Disney Concert Hall with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and his debut at Wiener Staatsoper as Second Englishman in Prokofiev’s *The Gambler* and Dandini in *La Cenerentola* with the Merola Opera Program. A recent graduate of the Adler Fellowship Program at the SFO, his many mainstage appearances include the roles of the Jailer in Tosca, Count Lamoral in *Arabella*, and an Angel in *It’s a Wonderful Life* conducted by Patrick Summers. A native of Santa Cruz, California, Pursell is a graduate of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and received his Master of Music degree from the University of Cincinnati College – Conservatory of Music (CCM). He won third prize in the 2021 James Toland Vocal Arts competition and is the recipient of the 2019 Igor Gorin Memorial Award and a 2017 Sara Tucker Study Grant. He also was the second award winner of the 2017 Jensen Foundation competition, winner of the 2017 Theodor Uppman Award from the Sullivan Foundation, and a national semi-finalist at the 2016 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

**HEIDI STOBER**
(UNITED STATES)
SOPRANO—MICAELE

Stunning audiences with her sterling lyric voice and incisive stage personality, lyric soprano Heidi Stober has established herself as a house favorite at leading companies on both sides of the Atlantic. An HGO Studio alumna, Stober has performed with HGO many times, including as Cleopatra in *Julius Caesar*, Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*, and Musetta in *La bohème*. During the 2020-21 season, Stober performed the role of Despina in *Così fan tutte* for The Metropolitan Opera and Staatsoper Hamburg, and as Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel* for San Francisco Opera; she also gave concert performances at the Grand Teton Music Festival. Since her critically acclaimed debut at the Deutsche Oper Berlin in 2008, Stober has cultivated a long-standing relationship with the company, where recent roles include Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, Micaela in *Carmen*, Marguerite in *Faust*, and Liu in *Turandot*. Other appearances include Angelica in *Orlando* at San Francisco Opera and Dalinda in *Ariodante* at the Lyric Opera of Chicago. Future highlights include performances of Blanche in *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, Zdenka in *Arabella* and Musetta in *La bohème*, returns to the Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Metropolitan Opera, and her house debut at the Teatro Real, Madrid. Stober holds a bachelor’s degree from Lawrence University and a Master of Music degree from the New England Conservatory.

**WILLIAM GUANBO SU**
(China)
BASS—ZUNIGA

A third-year HGO Studio artist from Beijing, William Guanbo Su is a Grand Finals Winner of the 2019 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the second place winner in HGO’s 2019 Eleanor McColum Competition Concert of Arias. Also during HGO’s 2021-22 season, Su will perform the roles of First Officer in *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, Second Armored Man in *The Magic Flute*, A Mandarin in *Turandot*, and the Duke of Verona in *Romeo and Juliet*. During the 2020-21 HGO Digital season, he performed the role of Bowie in *Turandot* and in fall 2019 with HGO, he performed the role of Usher in *Rigoletto*. He has studied German lied at the Franz Schubert Institute in Vienna, and in 2017 won first prize in the Gerda Lissner Lieder Competition. During the summer of 2019, he sang Count Ceprano in Verdi’s *Rigoletto* with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis as a Gerline Young Artist. Last spring, he made his Austin Opera debut as Angelotti in Tosca, and this summer, he returned to the Aspen Music Festival as a voice fellow to sing Sarastro in *The Magic Flute* and Garibaldo in *Rodelinda*.
RICARDO GARCIA  
(UNITED STATES)  
Dr. Ellen R. Gritz and Mr. Milton D. Rosenau Jr./Michelle Beale and Dick Anderson Fellow  
TENOR—EL REMENDADO

A second-year HGO Studio artist from Castro Valley, California, Ricardo Garcia completed his Master of Music in Voice at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music (SFCM) and holds a Bachelor of Music in Voice from the University of the Pacific. Also for HGO’s 2021-22 season, Garcia will perform the roles of Papi/Jasper in alternate cast performances of The Snowy Day, First Commissioner in Dialogues of the Carmelites, and Romeo in alternate cast performances of Romeo and Juliet. During the 2020-21 HGO Digital season he appeared in Vinkensport as Hans Sachs’s Trainer; The Making of The Snowy Day, an Opera for All; and Suite Española: Explorando Iberia. He was a studio artist at Wolf Trap Opera, where he covered Romeo in Romeo and Juliet and Giocondo in La pietra del paragone, and a voice fellow with Music Academy of the West, where he sang Jenik in The Bartered Bride. Recent roles include Lamplighter/Drunkard in The Little Prince and Fenton in Falstaff. As a first-year apprentice at Santa Fe Opera, he covered Parpignol in La bohème and sang Fenton/Normanno in the Apprentice Scenes Night. Recently, Garcia won the New Orleans District of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and advanced to the Gulf Coast Region finals.

LUKE SUTLIFF  
(UNITED STATES)  
Lynn Gissel/Brenda Harvey-Traylor Fellow  
BARITONE—EL DANCAIRO

A first-year HGO Studio artist from Littleton, Colorado, Luke Sutliff recently completed his Master of Music degree at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music. Also for HGO’s 2021-22 season, he will perform M. Javelinot / Thierry in Dialogues of the Carmelites and Mercutio in alternate cast performances of Romeo and Juliet. At the Shepherd School, he appeared as Kaiser Overall in Der Kaiser von Atlantis and Johannes Zegner in Proving Up. He holds a Bachelor of Music degree from the Juilliard School, where he studied with the late Sanford Sylvan and made his Alice Tully Hall debut performing Fauré’s L’horizon chimérique. Sutliff previously performed the roles of Demetrius in A Midsummer Night’s Dream and Belcore in The Elixir of Love at the Chautauqua Institute. Last summer, he had been set to make his debut in the role of Elder McLean in Susannah at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, but that was canceled due to COVID-19. Sutliff joined Santa Fe Opera as an Apprentice Artist for summer 2021, covering the role of Jon Seward in Romeo and Juliet for All; and Suite Española: Explorando Iberia. He obtained his Bachelor of Music in voice degree from the University of Kentucky School of Music and completed his Master of Music degree at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music. Sutliff was a studio artist at Wolf Trap Opera in 2018 and was set to return to Wolf Trap Opera for a second season in the summer of 2020 to perform the Commander and cover the title role in Eugene Onegin, as well as cover the role of Marcello in La bohème, but those productions were canceled due to COVID-19.

RAVEN MCMILLON  
(UNITED STATES)  
Kathleen Moore and Steven Homer/Nancy Haywood Fellow  
SOPRANO—FRASQUITA

A second-year HGO Studio artist from Baltimore, Raven McMillon was recently recognized as a 2021 Grand Finals Winner in the Metropolitan Opera’s newly-branded Dominique and Eric Laffont Competition. Also for HGO’s 2021-22 season, McMillon will perform the roles of Peter in The Snowy Day and Papagena in The Magic Flute. During the 2020-21 HGO Digital season, McMillon performed the roles of Rona Richards in The Impresario; Peter in The Making of The Snowy Day, an Opera for All; and Gretel in Hansel and Gretel. She also featured in the HGO Digital concert Giving Voice and performed as Sister Margareta in HGO’s My Favorite Things: Songs from The Sound of Music. McMillon received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Vocal Performance at Carnegie Mellon University and completed her graduate degree at the University of Cincinnati College – Conservatory of Music.

BLAKE DENSON  
(UNITED STATES)  
Gloria M. Portela and Richard E. Evans/Carolyn J. Levy/Liz Grimm and Jack Roth Fellow  
BARITONE—MORALES

Second-year HGO Studio artist Blake Denson, originally from Paducah, Kentucky, was a Grand Finals Winner in the 2020 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and is a 2018 alumnus of HGO’s Young Artists Vocal Academy (YAVA). Also for HGO’s 2021-22 season, Denson will perform the role of Daddy/Tim in alternate cast performances of The Snowy Day, Jailer in Dialogues of the Carmelites, and Gregorio in Romeo and Juliet. During the 2020-21 HGO Digital season he appeared in Giving Voice; Hansel and Gretel as Peter; and Suite Española: Explorando Iberia. He obtained his Bachelor of Music in voice degree from the University of Kentucky School of Music and completed his Master of Music degree at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music. Denson was a studio artist at Wolf Trap Opera in 2018 and was set to return to Wolf Trap Opera for a second season in the summer of 2020 to perform the Commander and cover the title role in Eugene Onegin, as well as cover the role of Marcello in La bohème, but those productions were canceled due to COVID-19.
Her opera credits include Adele in \textit{Die Fledermaus}; the title role in \textit{Goldie B. Locks and the Three Singing Bears}; Linfeia in \textit{La Calisto}; and Barbara in \textit{The Marriage of Figaro}. In addition to her opera credits, McMillon has also workshoped new roles such as Mary in Chiao’s \textit{The Secret Codes of Mary Bowser} and Lucy in Picker’s \textit{Awakenings}. Her recent roles included La Princesse in \textit{L’enfant et les sortilèges} with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Papagena in \textit{The Magic Flute} at CCM in the summer of 2020, which were canceled due to COVID-19. This summer she performed the role of Frasquita in \textit{Carmen} with Cincinnati Opera and Rosina in \textit{The Barber of Seville} with Opera Steamboat. Later this season, she joins Opera Philadelphia in her role and company debuts as Gilda in \textit{Rigoletto}.

**SUN-LY PIERCE**  
(UNITED STATES)  
Mr. and Mrs. Charles G. Nickson/John Serpe and Tracy Maddox Fellow  
MEZZO-SOPRANO—MERCEDES

Originally from Clinton, New York, Chinese American mezzo-soprano Sun-Ly Pierce is a second-year HGO Studio artist and the first prize winner in HGO’s 2020 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. Also for HGO’s 2021-22 season, she will perform the roles of Sister Mathilde in \textit{Dialogues of the Carmelites}, 2nd Lady in \textit{The Magic Flute}, and Stephano in \textit{Romeo and Juliet}. Last season with HGO, she appeared as Liesl in \textit{My Favorite Things: Songs from The Sound of Music} and as Hansel in HGO Digital’s \textit{Hansel and Gretel}. Pierce completed the graduate vocal arts program at the Bard College Conservatory of Music and holds a bachelor’s degree in vocal performance from the Eastman School of Music. As a winner of the Marilyn Horne Song Competition, Pierce was set to perform on an international recital tour with pianist Chien-Lin Lu featuring the premiere of a new song cycle by two-time Grammy Award–winning composer Jennifer Higdon, which was canceled due to COVID-19. In the fall of 2019, Pierce joined the Broad Street Orchestra as Dorinda in Handel’s \textit{Acis and Galatea}. She returned to the Music Academy of the West this summer as 2021 Vocal Fellow.

**PETER CHURSIN**  
(UNITED STATES)  
SOLO DANCER—THE BULL

Hailing from San Francisco, Peter Chursin has performed on Broadway in \textit{King Kong}, the revival of \textit{West Side Story}, \textit{Wicked}, and \textit{On the Town}. He has performed in regional productions including \textit{The Music Man} (Tommy Djilas) at Theatre Under the Stars, \textit{Brigadoon} at New York City Center, and \textit{Jerome Robbins’ Broadway} (King Simon) at The Muny. Chursin’s television credits include \textit{Fosse/Verdon} on FX (Christopher Chadman), \textit{Halston} on Netflix, \textit{Flesh and Bone} on STARZ, and \textit{Dancing with the Stars}. He also appeared in the movie \textit{Winter’s Tale}. He has had the honor to perform internationally with Complexions Contemporary Ballet, Twyla Tharp Dance, and Barak Ballet.

**MIKE BAERGA**  
(UNITED STATES)  
SOLO DANCER

Michael Baerga has appeared in \textit{The Merry Widow} at the Metropolitan Opera and \textit{Aida} at HGO. His Broadway credits include \textit{King Kong} (Chita Rivera Award, Special Tony, Outer Critics Circle Award); the 2017 revival of \textit{Miss Saigon} (6 Tony nominations); and \textit{Moulin Rouge} (Lab). He’s danced in regional productions of \textit{Can-Can}, \textit{The Hunchback of Notre Dame}, \textit{West Side Story}, and \textit{Kiss Me, Kate}. He will appear in the Disney+ film \textit{Better Nate Than Ever}. He holds a bachelor’s degree in dance and communications from the University of Houston and a Master of Fine Arts in dance from New York University.

**TISLARM BOUIE**  
(UNITED STATES)  
SOLO DANCER

Born and raised in Brownsville, Brooklyn, Tislarm Bouie attended Professional Performing Arts School in New York and received his Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. His film and television credits include \textit{In the Heights}, \textit{Saturday Night Live}, the Macy’s Thanksgiving Parade, \textit{Live from Lincoln Center}, and \textit{Mrs. America}. His theater credits include \textit{Gary a Sequel to Titus Andronicus} on Broadway and regional productions of \textit{Annie}, \textit{The Bodyguard}, \textit{Swing!}, and \textit{Blueprint Specials} at the Public Theater. He has danced for Coldplay, Alicia Keys, Jon Batiste, Bebe Rexha, Ronald K. Brown/ Evidence Dance Company, and Norwegian Cruise Line. Bouie’s choreography has been featured in \textit{Dance Magazine}, Brooklyn Dance Festival, New York Theatre Barn, and Young Choreographer’s Festival.
KENNY CORRIGAN
(UNITED STATES)
SOLO DANCER

Kenny has performed in An American in Paris (First International), Queen of The Night (NYC), Rock the Ballet (Sweetbird Productions), and Rasta Thomas’s Romeo and Juliet (International). He has performed with the Bad Boys of Ballet on America’s Got Talent (season 9 semi-finals) and at the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade as Jimmy Fallon’s body double. He performed on Saturday Night Live with Harry Styles and in a Swarovski commercial with Karlie Kloss. Corrigan has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Point Park University.

MARC HEITZMAN
(UNITED STATES)
SOLO DANCER

Marc Heitzman has appeared on Broadway in Bandstand (Dance Captain) and Cats (Plato/Macavity). His Off-Broadway and regional credits include Mark Stuart’s Standard Time and New York City Center’s Encore! works High Button Shoes and Bandstand (Papermill Playhouse). Heitzman has toured with the national tour for Movin’ Out (Eddie) and the international tour for Man in the Mirror (Dance Captain), and performed in Wexford Ireland’s Opera Festival and Broadway Christmas Wonderland in Tokyo. Other credits include New York Fashion Week, The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, The Kelly Clarkson Show, the movie What Is Life Worth, and Mark Stuart Dance Theatre’s When Change Comes. Recent projects include restaging the first national tour of Bandstand, working with Norwegian Cruise Line, and the movie Can You Keep a Secret? He is a proud member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society.

CAJAI FELLows JOHNSON
(UNITED STATES)
SOLO DANCER

Cajai Fellows Johnson is an actress, dancer, and singer who lives in New York City. Her credits include Frozen on Broadway; New York City Center’s Encores! work High Button Shoes; The Merry Widow, La traviata, Aida, and Adriana Lecouvreur (Venus) at The Metropolitan Opera; The Lion King (Young Nala, first national tour); and performing as a Knicks City Dancer at Madison Square Garden. Also a fine artist, Johnson has a BFA in Fine Arts from The Art Institute of Boston.

ROBIN MASELLA
(UNITED STATES)
SOLO DANCER

Robin Masella is a Broadway performer from New York. Most recently she has been seen on Broadway in Disney’s Frozen the Musical. Other Broadway credits include Charlie & the Chocolate Factory and Cats. Her New York and Off-Broadway credits include Evita (City Center), High Button Shoes (City Center), I Married an Angel (City Center), West Side Story (Carnegie Hall), Trip of Love (Stage 42), and Candide at Lincoln Center. Masella has traveled the country in the national tours for Evita and Chicago, where she understudied the role of Roxie Hart. She has worked regionally at Goodspeed Opera House, Sacramento Music Circus, The MUNY, Kansas City Rep, TUTS, Hartford Stage, and The Old Globe. She has performed on The Tonight Show, The Kelly Clarkson Show, The Tony Awards, and The Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. She served as Associate Director & Associate Choreographer for Chick Flick the Musical Off-Broadway, and choreographed Grease at Midland Center for the Arts. She also has served as choreographer for The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon.

BRITTANY MARCELL MONACHINO
(UNITED STATES)
SOLO DANCER

Brittany Monachino closed her first Broadway show with King Kong: Alive on Broadway. She has performed in productions of Kiss Me, Kate, Saturday Night Fever, and West Side Story. She has toured with Philadanco and Norwegian Cruise Line across the Hawaiian Islands, Europe, and North Africa. Other credits include Philadelphia’s Hairspray Live, The Washington Ballet, and Dianne McIntyre’s Why I Had to Dance, written by Ntozake Shange.

WALDEMAR QUIñONES-VILLANUEVA
(UNITED STATES)
SOLO DANCER

Waldemar Quiñones-Villanueva also danced in HGO’s Carmen in 2014. His theater credits include West Side Story on Broadway and its first national tour, Zorba! at Encores City Center, Man of La Mancha at Barrington Stage, Billy Elliot at Maltz Jupiter Theater, Priscilla Queen of the Desert at Fiddlehead Theater, Jerome Robbins’ Broadway at TUTS, Evita at The Rep, and Seven Brides for Seven Brothers at The Muny. He has performed professionally with the Metropolitan Opera, Sydney Opera House, Ópera de Puerto Rico, Ballet Hispanico of...
New York, Ballet Concierto, Ballet San Juan, and Staten Island Ballet. He has performed with popular artists Marc Anthony, Olga Tañon, La India, and Celia Cruz, and in a performance for Pope John Paul II. Television appearances include *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, *The Billboard Music Awards*, *Grammy Awards*, and *Ms. Universe*. His choreography has been featured on *Objetivo Fama*, *Jodi McQueen Project*. He graduated cum laude from the University of Puerto Rico with a bachelor’s degree in education.

**MARIAH RESHEA REIVES**  
(UNITED STATES)  
SOLO DANCER

Hailing from Sanford, North Carolina, Mariah Reives trained at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts program for high school students and has a B.A. in Teaching Dance from Marymount Manhattan College. She was last seen playing Cassandra in the first national tour of the Broadway revival of *Cats*. She has also performed in shows including *Me and My Girl* (Ensemble), *The New Yorkers* (Ensemble), *Jerome Robbins’ Broadway* (Ensemble), and *The Wiz* (Ensemble). She has appeared on television for *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, *So You Think You Can Dance*, and as Robin Roberts’s body double. Reives is also a teacher and choreographer.

**ALLISON WALSH**  
(UNITED STATES)  
SOLO DANCER

Allison Walsh is a multifaceted performer whose nearly two-decade career spans musical theater, TV, film, and classical and contemporary dance. After her first career with the Joffrey Ballet, she learned to use her voice starring as Lise Dassin in the first national tour of *An American in Paris*, as well as in the musical’s original Broadway cast. Other credits include originating the role of Odette/Olga Romanov in Ahrens and Flaherty’s *Anastasia* and all episodes of the STARZ TV series *Flesh and Bone*. She has collaborated with incredible artists and performed at the White House, Whitney Biennial, Guggenheim Museum, and the Vail International Dance Festival.

**SHANNON WEIR**  
(SOUTH AFRICA)  
SOLO DANCER

Shannon Weir holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Pace University’s Commercial Dance Program. Her credits include *An American in Paris* (national tour), *West Side Story* (Velma, IHL Theater Tokyo), Broadway Ballet HERO Awards (soloist), *Mamma Mia!* (Arts Center of Coastal Carolina), and Broadway Dance Lab (swing).
Tenor Richard Trey Smagur takes center stage for Carmen.

OUT OF CHARACTER

By Natalie Barron, Associate Director of Marketing and Communications
It was only a year and a half ago that Richard Trey Smagur graduated from the HGO Studio. Since then, the talented tenor has already returned to HGO once—in a scene-stealing turn as The Witch in HGO Digital’s production of Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel*. Now he’s back for his first lead role on the Wortham stage, as our Don José in *Carmen*. It’s the second time this year that he’s portrayed the hot-headed character; this spring he also performed Don José in an abridged version with Atlanta Opera. In a review, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* called him “unforgettable,” and we agree! Smagur took the time to chat with *Opera Cues* about his time with the HGO Studio, playing The Witch, and taking center stage as Don José:

**You have a rich history with HGO—you were a member of the HGO Studio and have performed on the Wortham stages many times. What was it like being a part of the Studio?**

Training with the HGO Studio was a major turning point in my professional and private life. When I arrived in Houston, I still had a lot to learn about the opera world—as well as being an adult and all the wonders and terrors that includes. The Studio staff are all industry leaders, and such a wonderful mix of encouraging and challenging, that I quickly became addicted to becoming the best version of myself. I was also incredibly lucky that HGO allowed me to stay for a third year, as I was able to begin to find my artistic voice and take more risks on stage and in my music making.

**What memory stands out from your time in the HGO Studio?**

Besides getting to meet some of my closest friends, there is one memory that sticks out more than any other: returning to the Wortham after having been away due to the Harvey floods. Everyone was so excited. Even for the veterans of the theater, things seemed new again. There was such strong and thrilling energy to Opening Night! It was also my largest role during my time with the Studio; I performed the Steersman in *The Flying Dutchman*. Singing on the Brown stage for the first time is something that I’ll never forget.

**You made your HGO debut in *La traviata* right after Hurricane Harvey, at the quickly built Resilience Theater inside the George R. Brown Convention Center. What was it like making your company debut outside the Wortham?**

In a way, I was lucky to have come in for the 2017-18 season. It made me highly adaptable and ready to do things that otherwise may have seemed strange in the opera world. *La traviata* was great fun because it was when I met all of my HGO Studio colleagues as we were all in the show together. Though the season was full of challenges, it brought the Studio members closer together. Everyone was focused on putting on the best show possible, regardless of the circumstances, I will forever be proud of what HGO was able to do in a time of such distress.

**Most recently, HGO audiences got to witness you in the hilariously dark role of The Witch in HGO Digital premiere of *Hansel and Gretel*. How did you prepare for that?**

It was so fun to get to portray The Witch. Lileana Blain-Cruz (the work’s director) had such an electrifying energy, every day on set was a blast! Luckily for me, my girlfriend is a huge fan of *Ru Paul’s Drag Race*. I watch with her from time to time, and it was a major inspiration for me. I tried to tell myself that this was my other persona and let the fantastic costumes and makeup, music, and impressive animations do the rest of the talking.

**What was your favorite scene?**

The Witch is really in one very long scene, in which she is trying to fatten up the children for the oven—right until she’s tossed in! My favorite part was working with Raven McMillon and Sun-Ly Pierce (current HGO Studio members). Portraying The Witch is infinitely more fun when you have fantastic singing actresses like them to interact with. It was a joy to play in the fairytale world with them every day.

**You really embraced the Southern twang—where did you pull inspiration from for that?**

Ha! This was very easy! Maestro Summers and Lileana approached me and asked if I would be comfortable doing a Southern accent. I, being a native of Appalachian Georgia, felt as though I had been training my whole life for that moment! I also had previously taken a deep dive into a personal favorite role of mine, Sam from Floyd’s *Susannah*, and was comfortable putting the accent into the singing because of it.
Speaking of HGO Digital, filming an opera was new to all of us. How was your experience as a performer?

One cannot stress enough the differences between performing for a live audience and for the camera. There are magical moments in both, but they are very different. On the stage, it’s difficult to go too big, and most of the time the directors will say, “I’ll let you know when it’s too much.” In film, too much is what you’re fighting against. I wanted to create an over the top and dramatic character, while still seeming real. To me, the greatest part of doing film is that you get so many takes. You can really change your interpretations and reactions in each one, and that is so much fun.

Of course, Don José is very different from The Witch. How did you prepare?

Don José is one of my absolute favorite roles. He has such a dynamic motion in the show, and he can really influence how the audience leaves the theater. I was incredibly lucky to have been asked to perform an abridged version of Carmen at the Atlanta Opera in the spring of 2021. I was able to sing a majority of the role working in a totally new environment. It was a great challenge but helped to boost my confidence as I come back to the Wortham.

What is it like coming back to HGO as a Studio alum to perform in Carmen?

It’s a tremendous honor. When I think of all the great principal artists who I got to hear at HGO and the music that they made come alive, I am filled with excitement at the prospect of doing the same. HGO has set such a high bar for artistry. It’s a thrill just thinking about performing—working in the same room as my colleagues and discovering the art together. I’m also very excited to see so many familiar, friendly faces, and to eat some dang good food!

What do you hope audiences get out of Carmen?

For me, Carmen is a total thrill ride. The story gets heavier and more intense until a final culmination of rage and jealousy tragically ends a woman’s life. This story has relevance today, as we still see so many stories with the same unfortunate ending in the media. I hope that while people understand the darkness of the show, they also are able to revel in the absolute magnificence of Bizet’s score. Though Bizet did not leave a tremendous amount of operatic literature for us, the pieces that we do have are musical masterpieces, and in my opinion Carmen is at the pinnacle.

This is one of our first live performances since the start of the pandemic. What thoughts and emotions are going through your mind?

The pandemic is such a difficult thing to describe, especially because it’s ongoing. I am grateful that enough people have chosen to become vaccinated that we can go back to work and make beautiful music again. People, including me, have been longing for live theater for so long now. I can’t wait to be part of a performance that brings live opera back to Houston. It will be such a joy to make music again, and with such great friends.
Following the success of its debut season, HGO Digital, the Sarah and Ernest Butler Performance Series, is back for 2021-22 with a fantastic roster of recitals and operatic works to complement the company’s mainstage offerings. Here’s what to expect during the exciting season ahead:

The brilliant, witty Three Decembers streams during HGO Digital’s second season.

Photo credit: Mark Leialoha
**FALL 2021**

**HGO Studio Showcase**
Always a highlight, this annual event, filmed this season with a limited audience present, highlights the diverse talents of our HGO Studio artists as they perform staged, costumed vignettes from a variety of operatic works. *Release, Nov. 12; streams through Dec. 12. Free.*

**WINTER 2021**

**Jake Heggie's Three Decembers**
Originally commissioned by HGO and based on Terrence McNally’s original script *Some Christmas Letters*, this chamber opera from composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer made its world premiere in Houston in 2008. Experience the work again in this new digital production, created in conjunction with Opera San José and starring Susan Graham. *Release, Dec. 10; streams through Jan. 9. Paid.*

**WINTER 2022**

**Concert of Arias**
At the 34th Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers Concert of Arias, the talented artists selected to compete during this popular event will vie for a spot training with the prestigious HGO Studio. *Live, Jan. 21; streams through Feb. 20. Free.*

**WINTER 2022**

**Live from The Cullen: Lauren Snouffer**

**SPRING 2022**

**Live from The Cullen: Michelle Bradley**

**SPRING 2022**

**Live from The Cullen: Federico de Michelis**
The renowned Argentinian bass-baritone Federico de Michelis shares tango and chamber songs from his home country alongside jazz standards. He also plays guitar, with Emiliano Messiez on piano. *Release, May 13; streams through Jun. 12. Free.*

**SPRING 2022**

**Suite Española II**
Building on the critical and audience response for spring 2021’s *Suite Española: Explorando Iberia*, created by and starring the incomparable Ana María Martínez, this follow-up program celebrates the musical traditions of Spanish-speaking cultures in Central and South America. *Release, Jun. 10, streams through Jul. 10. Paid.*

**The second season of HGO Digital will feature all free performances with two exceptions, Three Decembers and Suite Española II, which will require payment before viewing. Performances will be available for streaming for 30 days after their release. Check HGODigital.org for details on how to enjoy these performances.**

**SUMMER 2022**

**Giving Voice**
Art & Activism

A conversation with composer Joel Thompson.

The University of Michigan Men’s Glee Club performing Seven Last Words of the Unarmed

Photo credit: University of Michigan
Composer Joel Thompson’s *The Snowy Day* makes its much-anticipated world premiere this December at the Wortham. Based on the enduringly popular children’s book by Ezra Jack Keats and created with librettist Andrea Davis Pinkney, the HGO-commissioned opera shares the sweet story of a young Black child named Peter, out exploring the city on a snow day.

In many respects, *The Snowy Day*, Thompson’s first opera, is a new kind of project for the composer. Until now, he has written music to process grief and pain, and to confront an unjust society. Yet the innocent wonder of Peter’s day in the snow carries with it its own form of activism: a vision for a better world. HGO Dramaturg Jeremy Johnson sat down with Thompson to talk about the role of art in society, in activism, and in healing.

**JEREMY JOHNSON:** Talk to us about music as a form of activism.

**JOEL THOMPSON:** I’ve always been aware of music’s transformative power. Music-makers within the canons of almost every genre use their craft to address what matters most to them, from the political (Beethoven’s *Eroica*, Husa’s *Music for Prague 1968*, Monâe’s *Hell You Talibout*) to their own existence (Strauss’s *Ein Heldenleben*, Ives’s *The Unanswered Question*, Spalding’s *12 Little Spells*). Sometimes I feel that to characterize my music as a form of activism is a slight to real activism, an artform in and of itself. I see myself as more in dialogue with the aforementioned artists, creating works about whatever matters to us. I want to use my art in service of the positive transformation of my community, my society, my world, myself—we can call it whatever: activism, ethical artistry, community building, or even just survival.

**JJ:** Your most frequently performed work is *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*, commemorating the lives of seven Black men killed at the hands of authority figures—which is perhaps unexpected, since you originally wrote it without any intention of having it performed.

**JT:** At that time, when I had just finished my master’s in choral conducting and was teaching at a small college in south Georgia, I only wrote music for myself. When I wrote *Seven Last Words*, in about November 2014, I was in a state of depression: I only realized it after the fact, but writing this piece was not a healthy process, even though it felt cathartic at the time. I used it as a way to process my own feelings and grief about what had been an extended spate of murders. I put the piece away, and it wasn’t until the following April that I took it out again, when Freddie Gray died in Baltimore. I was in search of the same catharsis I had when writing *Seven Last Words*, so I reached out to some friends in Atlanta to see if anyone wanted to sing the piece together. We got together in a room at Emory, and the energy in the room completely shifted. Someone called Dr. Eugene Rogers at the University of Michigan Men’s Glee Club, and he brought the piece to U-M the following November. It brought an end to what I had been doing, which was just writing for myself, and I’m still excavating those emotions and moving on from there, still grappling with the performative and private aspects of composition.

**JJ:** It premiered in November 2015 for men’s chorus and piano, and since then you’ve made mixed chorus and orchestrated versions of the piece. Was it difficult to share this private composition with audiences?

**JT:** I was afraid of what people would say. At the original premiere, I sat by myself in the audience, and I made sure no one knew who I was. Dr. Rogers called me to the stage for a bow and blew my cover, though—when I went back to my seat for the rest of the concert, everyone in the audience was looking at me like I was radioactive, and I was so afraid of what they were going to say. It was mostly a positive response; if people were uncomfortable, they avoided me. It wasn’t until after the premiere that I heard about so much of the negative feedback. There was a district judge in Michigan who wrote a letter to the U-M Glee Club, asking why they would ever choose to commemorate these “thugs.” There were vitriolic responses threatening to withdraw financial support from the university. I was always afraid that something bad was going to happen at the following performances. Those feelings weren’t even close to the emotions I felt at the premiere of the orchestral version, a little over a year later. I sat next to Amadou Diallo’s mom. We held hands and wept the whole time. After the performance, she leaned over to me and whispered something that will stay between the two of us, something that made me so aware of and in awe of the power of music in our lives. I keep that memory in my mind at all times.

**JJ:** You once told me that you hope *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* would never be performed again.

**JT:** I don’t know where I stand on that statement now—still in the process of figuring that out. It’s difficult to express the complicated feelings I have around this piece. After it was first performed, no one else wanted to touch it with a ten-foot pole. Fast forward to 2020, and the piece is being programmed everywhere. For all the performances this upcoming season, it’s still going to be “relevant”—if we’re not talking about George Floyd or Daunte Wright or Ahmaud Arbery, we’re going to be talking about other people who look like us who have died in the same way. Especially as the pandemic is lifting, if we’re going “back to normal”—and normal for Black people in America is death—then this piece will remain in the forefront, and I hate that about it. I hope for a day when the piece...
will be performed like it’s a relic, like, “Oh, this is what happened back in the day, this doesn’t happen anymore.” And now there are so many tragedy-oriented pieces of music. It’s part of this ambulance-chasing element of composing, writing about the most recent tragedy, and it’s tiring. It reinforces the belief that the foundation of Blackness in America is tragedy, is death. To a certain extent that’s true, but there’s so much more. Now that the spotlight is centered on the marginalized, Black composers are in a tricky spot. I talk about this with my peers a lot. We want to be honest about our reality, to be true to the state of our country and our place in it, our community’s place in it, but we also don’t want to revel in it or have it be the summation of who we are.

JJ: How does *The Snowy Day* fit into this context?

JT: The piece I was writing right before this commission was *An Act of Resistance*, an orchestra piece that comments on the divisiveness and turmoil in our world, and our deficiency in empathy and the strength to love one another. I had also recently finished “After,” a song for mezzo-soprano and violin about sexual assault. I was grappling with a lot of negative content, and then here comes *The Snowy Day*—I was trying to figure out what my way into the story could be, and all of a sudden Peter (the story’s protagonist) started talking to me about finding my inner child. I was looking at the world with eyes of wonder instead of fear, where fear had been my predominant perspective before *The Snowy Day*. Working on this piece really did show me that there’s another way of looking at the world. I’m so glad this was my first opera. The opera is a representation of the society that I want to live in, what I’m aiming for. The goal of everything I’ve ever written bends toward what’s going to happen on stage with *The Snowy Day*, where a little Black boy can wander in the snow, learn about himself, learn about the world, be safe, be happy, and connect with others regardless of background, or ethnicity, or any other differences. I hope audience members can see themselves in Peter and his friends and reconnect to their inner child. I hope that the final product will provide the audience with the same healing, and rejuvenation of empathy, as the compositional process did for me.

JJ: When an artist makes a statement about the world around them, someone who disagrees with that statement often says something along the lines of “you’re only here to entertain us.” What are your thoughts on that sentiment? What future do you want to see for opera and its role in cultural society?

JT: When I take a breath and set aside my hurt at that comment, I realize that the art has worked. The art has created a state of discomfort in which one can then choose to grow—to grapple with the concepts presented and the emotions stirred, and to look inward—or to remain unchanged and dismiss the opportunity for growth because of how uncomfortable it would be. I love when art throws you into that dilemma. It’s sometimes deeply disturbing, and sometimes angering, but then we have a choice. We can examine how and why it provokes such a visceral response within us, or we can angrily demand a refund. If we choose the former, we can still dislike the art and our experience of it, but we will learn something about ourselves and each other. For me, that’s how the growth happens, that’s how the transformation happens. Opera is an art form that combines the transformational power of music, visual art, theater, and dance in service of a singular communal experience—it depends on our capacity to connect to one another through our stories. If we do the work to make opera a space where people of all ages, ethnicities, sexual and gender identities, socioeconomic backgrounds, abilities, and levels of education have access to this art form, I think that opera can revolutionize our society. If everyone in a community can see and hear themselves on stage, and in the creative team, and play a part in sharing and holding space for each other’s stories, opera can become the space where we connect in an age of increasing isolation. That’s the future I’d like to see. ■
HGO’s signature white tie event returns with a dreamy Moroccan adventure and exotic festival of the senses. Join Houston’s most notable leaders and tastemakers for cocktails, dinner, a luxe silent auction, and dancing the night away.

Saturday, April 9, 2022
6:30 P.M.
Wortham Theater Center

Auction Chairs
Teresa and José Ivo

Tickets from $1,500* | Tables from $15,000
*Young Professional tickets $750

White Tie

HGO.org/operaball
SETTING THE SCENES

The making of Studio Showcase

Every August, the energy rises in the hallways at Houston Grand Opera when we welcome the new and returning artists who’ve been selected to train with the company’s highly competitive HGO Studio program. Their season is busy right from the start, as we immediately jump into production for Studio Showcase, an evening of opera scenes performed in the Cullen Theater each September. This year’s installment took place on September 18 before a limited invited audience.

The process of producing Showcase begins almost immediately after new Studio artists are selected (typically in February, after the annual Concert of Arias competition). An exhaustive search for scenes ensues—through conversations with the artists, HGO staff members, and exploration of many scores, we assemble a long list of possibilities to consider. Scenes can serve many purposes, but all are rooted in the artists’ individual talents and needs. One might provide a “safe” preview of a singer’s future, in a role that they’re likely to sing a few years down the road. Another may provide the opportunity to develop a challenging character or dig deeply into a piece of drama that helps a singer to expand their dramatic skills. Scenes from the upcoming mainstage season are often included to give artists a chance to begin developing a given role well before the production, while others are selected because they are a clear match for the unique quality of a particular singer’s voice.

This year’s scenes illustrate these factors in programming choices. We have a few notable “future” roles represented: anyone who has heard Blake Denson sing knows he has a powerful and rich voice, and it’s not difficult to hear that he’ll one day be a great Rigoletto. Paired with him in the scene is Raven McMillon, who will sing her first Gilda later this season in Philadelphia. While these two roles represent different stages in the two singers’ development, the scene serves their artistic development equally. The scene from The Rake’s Progress was selected from an entirely different view; this fascinating piece of drama provides singers Ricardo Garcia and Cory McGee with a dramatic feast, allowing for the most detailed and nuanced stage direction and development of character, while also highlighting their vocal gifts. Finally, Der Rosenkavalier was impossible to resist this year, as these roles will undoubtedly play an important part in the future for Elena Villalón and Sun-Ly Pierce, both of whom bring distinctive voices to this ravishing duet.

Starting with a long list, the scenes are carefully pared down to the eight or nine vignettes audiences enjoy each year during the program. Over the summer, singers and pianists learn the scenes, preparing to coach and stage them as soon as they arrive in Houston. A guest stage director is engaged each season, and we take care to select someone who is particularly gifted in developing talent and supporting young artists through the process—this year, Kristine McIntyre joins us for the second time, after her big success with last year’s fully-digital Showcase. The process gives artists information about what to expect in the season ahead. During Showcase rehearsals, artists learn how to work with our stage management team, what to expect in rehearsals, how to map their paths from the dressing rooms to the stage, and what it’s like to sing onstage at the Wortham. By the date of the performance, they know much more about how HGO works, and have built confidence that will bolster their work in mainstage roles with guest singers, conductors, and directors.

If this all sounds very interesting, but you missed Studio Showcase this year (or want to see it again), you’re in luck. The program is part of our HGO Digital season again this year—the live performance was recorded in high-quality video and will be released on November 12; it will be available for viewing, for free, through December 12 at HGODigital.org.

—Brian Speck, HGO Studio Director
Raven McMillon, soprano  
Kathleen Moore and Steven Homer/ Nancy Haywood Fellow

Elena Villalón, soprano  
Mr. and Mrs. Harlan C. Stai Fellow

Sun-Ly Pierce, mezzo-soprano  
Mr. and Mrs. Charles G. Nickson/ John Serpe and Tracy Maddox Fellow

Emily Treigle, mezzo-soprano  
Mr. and Mrs. James W. Crownover/ Mr. Veer Vashita Fellow

Ricardo Garcia, tenor  
Dr. Ellen R. Gritz and Mr. Milton D. Rosenau Jr./Michelle Beale and Dick Anderson Fellow

Eric Taylor, tenor  
Jill and Alyn Risley/ Sharon Ley Lietzow and Robert Lietzow/Drs. Rachel and Warren A. Ellsworth IV Fellow

Blake Denson, baritone  
Gloria M. Portela and Richard E. Evans/ Carolyn J. Levy/Liz Grimm and Jack Roth Fellow

Luke Sutliff, baritone  
Lynn Gissel/Brenda Harvey-Traylor Fellow

Cory McGee, bass  
Beth Madison Fellow

William Guanbo Su, bass  
Anne and Albert Chao Fellow

Alex Munger, pianist/coach  
Gary Hollingsworth and Ken Hyde/ Trey Yates/Dr. Sauli and Ursula Balagura Fellow

Bin Yu Sanford, pianist/coach  
Stephanie Larsen/ Dr. and Mrs. Miguel Miro-Quesada/ Ms. Lynn Des Prez Fellow

The HGO Studio is grateful for the in-kind support of the Texas Voice Center. The Young Artists Vocal Academy (YAVA) is generously underwritten by Mr. and Mrs. Robert N. Wakefield and the HGO Guild.

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1. Supporting Teachers

It has long been part of HGOco’s mission to provide meaningful learning experiences to Houston’s arts educators, which they then pass on to their students. Often open to the public, our professional development workshops for teachers and lifelong learners have covered topics including HGO productions, rehearsal techniques, and tools of the opera trade.

We make it a priority to listen to our educator community about their needs before creating programming. Last year, as the pandemic set in and learning went remote, HGOco worked with HISD to provide sessions for music teachers focused on fostering social and emotional learning, to help them and their students cope with a difficult year. This year, after consulting with HISD’s Dr. Damian Price, District Music Curriculum Specialist, we switched to a broader topic to inspire teachers: music making and healthy singing. In late August, two powerhouse performers and HGO favorites, Lindsay Kate Brown (HGO Studio alumna) and Cecilia Duarte (Renata in Cruzar la Cara de la Luna), shared their expertise by teaching healthy vocal techniques over the course of four online sessions.

“It was such a joy to watch these incredible singers lead teachers in warmups and vocal exercises,” shares HGOco Interim Education Manager Kathleen Brown. “After a year of struggle in the classroom, it was wonderful seeing the teachers have fun and get excited about this school year.”

The HGOco team is looking forward to sharing a similar program with the public later this year. —Alisa Magallón, HGOco Interim Director

2. Engaging Our Community Partners

One of HGOco’s most rewarding partnerships is with The Beacon, a non-profit organization serving Houston’s homeless community, and Brigid’s Hope, a program within The Beacon for formerly homeless, previously incarcerated women.

HGOco activities around the partnership include offering Cultivating Empathy workshops for staff, volunteers, and clients; inviting them to experience operas at the Wortham; and collaborating on a new Song of Houston project, The Other City (working title). Set to premiere in 2023, the project will share the real stories of Houstonians who have experienced homelessness.

According to Rebecca Landes, The Beacon’s CEO, the virtual workshops HGOco held with the organization during the pandemic provided the team with a wonderful boost. “At a time when our team was particularly down and just exhausted from the work during COVID, the chance to listen to beautiful music, recall a musical memory, and share with a team member was just so refreshing and inspiring for our staff. It was a welcome break from the day to day and a chance to build relationships within the team in a unique, fun way.”

Regina Walker, Program Director of Brigid’s Hope, echoed that and shared that she was looking forward to bringing her clients back to the Wortham for a night of grand opera. “It was a new experience for both the clients and me,” she shared, remembering their trip to see The Phoenix. “The ladies were able to get all dressed up and were so excited. It made them feel special.”

The HGOco team is so grateful to The Beacon’s clients and staff who generously shared their stories for the Song of Houston project, and happy to hear that it has been a valuable opportunity for them, too. “I am excited that our neighbors experiencing homelessness have directly contributed to the process of creating an opera that focuses on homelessness,” said Landes. “Having the creative team at HGO draw from the experiences of our clients and staff is simply phenomenal. We cannot wait to see it unfold!” —Andy Horton, former HGOco Community Initiatives Coordinator

Learn more about The Beacon and Brigid’s Hope at beaconhomeless.org.
A new season means new faces in the Bauer Family High School Voice Studio. This audition-only program for gifted high school juniors and seniors has been a strong tradition at HGO for more than two decades. Formed in 1999 to foster emerging talent in the world of classical voice, the program selects eight to ten exceptionally talented students from Houston-area high schools to participate in the program every season, at no cost to their families. These students receive private voice lessons, monthly masterclasses from opera professionals, tickets to HGO’s orchestra dress rehearsals, reimbursement for college visits, and audition support, and they are eligible for scholarships at the end of the year.

In August, the BFHSVS class of '22 gathered virtually for an intensive “bootcamp” during which they got to know each other, learned about the program, and sang for their voice teachers: HGO Studio alumna Alicia Gianni, Sam Houston State University professor Christopher Michel, and University of Houston professor Héctor Vásquez. While last year’s program was entirely virtual, this year we plan to move forward with a mix of virtual and in-person masterclasses supplemented by a strong online presence. The first masterclass of the season, taught by HGO Artistic Advisor Ana María Martínez, was held in September and, like all of our masterclasses, can be viewed on the HGOco YouTube channel.

“I am so excited for the learning I’ll receive and doors that will be opened by being part of BFHSVS,” shared incoming student Elena Oliveira, a senior at Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. “Even after just one day at orientation, I was already amazed at the opportunities to come. I’m so grateful to be able to work with the professionals at BFHSVS and learn from peers who share my passion.”

We can’t wait to see how these talented students grow as musicians and artists in the coming months! —Kathleen Brown, HGOco Interim Education Manager

Meet the 2021-22 Bauer Family High School Voice Studio students:

Victoria Cerda, Soprano, Senior, Eisenhower High School

Morgan Lane, Soprano, Senior, Cinco Ranch High School

Nicholas Mathew, Baritone, Senior, Shadow Creek High School

Elena Oliveira, Soprano, Senior, Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts

Luisa Iero, Mezzo-Soprano, Senior, St. Agnes Academy

Yerim Colin, Baritone, Junior, Tomball Memorial High School

Lindsay Feldman, Soprano, Senior, Morton Ranch High School

Jackie Hickman, Soprano, Senior, Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts

Samantha Pape, Mezzo-Soprano, Senior, Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts

Meet the 2021-22 Bauer Family High School Voice Studio students:
4. Pondering Character

HGO launched Seeking the Human Spirit, its six-year, multidisciplinary initiative highlighting universal themes in opera, in 2017. STHS seeks to expand and deepen Houstonians’ connections to opera and to art. Past programs have ranged from a walking gallery recital in partnership with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston for Don Giovanni, to a short film competition for young Houston filmmakers centered around The Magic Flute. For the 2021-22 season, which marks year five of this groundbreaking initiative, we’re exploring the theme of character in relationship to four mainstage operas: Carmen, The Snowy Day, Dialogues of the Carmelites, and Turandot.

In each opera, the protagonist faces a choice: find the strength of character within or succumb to insecurity or social pressures. What grounds each of these decisions? Is it faith, community, morality, or self-determination? Through this season’s programs, we seek to help our audiences explore their own relationships to character and deepen their connections to the characters of this season. Our STHS partners this year include Buffalo Bayou Partnership, Institute for Spirituality & Health, Asia Society Texas Center, Discovery Green, Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center, Emancipation Park Conservancy, Houston Methodist Center for Performing Arts Medicine, and the Houston Coalition Against Hate.

We’ll be offering private programs at Methodist’s Center for Performing Arts Medicine critical care inpatient program, as well as with the Institute for Spirituality & Health at Texas Medical Center as part of the Courage to Search course at The Women’s Home. Public activities will include our popular Songs on the Water recitals with Buffalo Bayou Partnership and Carols on the Green at Discovery Green.

HGOco is also committed to providing quality digital programming. For a second season, we will continue Music and Healing, an online series hosted by HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers that explores the relationship between music and medicine. We also will launch What if?, a new series offered in “webinar” format, during which participants will explore the circumstances of the principal characters in our STHS operas with artists and experts, and then contemplate alternate choices the characters could make. —Emily N. Wells, HGOco Senior Producing Manager

For details on HGOco programs, visit HGO.org/HGOco.

Join HGOco to explore this year’s theme through operas including Dialogues of the Carmelites.

HGOco Funders

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Union Pacific Foundation

The activities of Houston Grand Opera are supported in part by funds provided by the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance and by a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts.

The NEXUS Initiative
HGOco programs, including Student Performances and HGO’s performances at Miller Outdoor Theatre, are supported through the NEXUS Initiative, which is made possible by:

- Anchorage Foundation of Texas
- BBVA
- The Brown Foundation, Inc.
- The Wortham Foundation, Inc.
- Shell
Houston Grand Opera Guild welcomes you back to the Wortham Theater Center!

The HGO Guild provides you with volunteering opportunities that support activities at Houston Grand Opera. Joining the HGO Guild is your opportunity to meet talented performers and other opera professionals. Visit hgoguild.org for information.

**Volunteer opportunities include:**

- **The Artist Hospitality Program** gives our visiting guest artists personalized transportation and plenty of attention to detail. Contact Deirdre at deirdremcdowell@me.com for more information.

- **The Buddies Program** supports visiting performers and Studio Artists through special friendships. You can “adopt” a budding artist with the HGO Studio and be their in-town family. Call 713-546-0269 for more information.

- **The Boutique** is a pop-up store in the Wortham’s grand foyer that offers opportunities to show your interest in merchandising, retail sales, cashiering, and teamwork! The HGO Boutique’s proceeds are used to fund many of HGO’s opera programs. Contact Kris at ktaylor2106@sbcglobal.net.

**Shop the Boutique!**

The HGO Guild’s Boutique is opening the 2021-2022 season with all new fall merchandise and accessories, jewelry, CDs and DVDs, books and more. The holidays are coming and what better gift than one from the Guild’s Boutique!

Guild Underwriters include Maria Bryant, Lynn Gissel, Teresa and José Ivo, Laura and Brad McWilliams, Kathleen Moore & Steve Homer, Jill and Allyn Risley, Shirley Rose, Glen Rosenbaum, Sybil F. Roos & Betsy Garlinger, and Janet Sims.
If you are looking to spend less time managing family finances, and more time with family, then your calendar is now wide open.
The Impresarios Circle is Houston Grand Opera's premier donor recognition society. These vanguard supporters who provide annual support of at least $100,000 are instrumental to HGO’s success. For information, please contact Greg Robertson, chief advancement officer, at 713-546-0274 or grobertson@hgo.org.

ROBIN ANGLY AND MILES SMITH
HGO subscribers Robin and Miles joined the Founders Council in 2010. The company is honored to have Robin on the HGO Board of Directors and as a member of HGO’s Laureate Society. The couple is very familiar with the view from the HGO stage as well—both are former singers in the HGO Chorus. Robin and Miles have been donors to HGO special events, the Young Artists Vocal Academy, and HGO’s Ring cycle. They are charter members of the Impresarios Circle and generously underwrite a mainstage production each season.

JANICE BARROW
Jan’s relationship with HGO extends back to the early 1980s, when she and her late husband, Dr. Thomas Barrow, first became subscribers. Jan is a member of HGO’s Laureate Society and the Founders Council, contributing to HGO’s main stage and special events. She also supports the HGO Studio, having underwritten several rising opera stars over the past 20 years. Jan’s late husband, Tom, former chairman of the HGO Board of Directors, was instrumental in the concept and construction of the Wortham Center. A lifelong lover of music, Jan is past president of the Houston Symphony and has a special affinity for Puccini and Wagner.

THE BROWN FOUNDATION, INC.
The Brown Foundation, Inc., established in 1951 by Herman and Margaret Root Brown and George R. and Alice Pratt Brown, has been a treasured partner of HGO since 1984. Based in Houston, the Foundation distributes funds principally for education, community service, and the arts, especially the visual and performing arts. HGO is tremendously grateful for The Brown Foundation’s leadership support, which has been critical to the company’s unprecedented growth and success in recent years. The Brown Foundation was among the lead contributors to HGO’s Hurricane Harvey and COVID-19 recovery efforts.

SARAH AND ERNEST BUTLER
HGO subscribers for over 20 years, Ernest and Sarah are the lead underwriters for the company’s digital artistic programming for the 2020-21 season. They also have generously endowed three chairs at HGO: those of HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers, Chorus Master Richard Bado, and HGO Chorus Concertmaster Denise Tarrant. Because supporting young artists is a particular passion for both, HGO’s Concert of Arias is one of their favorite annual events. Ernest and Sarah reside in Austin and are longtime supporters of Ballet Austin, Austin Opera, Austin Symphony Orchestra, the Texas Cultural Trust, and the University of Texas Butler School of Music, which has carried their name since 2008. Ernest and Sarah are world travelers, and they never miss an opportunity to see opera in the cities they visit.

ANNE AND ALBERT CHAO
Anne and Albert have been subscribers and supporters of HGO for the past two decades. While serving as president and CEO of Westlake Chemical Corporation, Albert finds time for numerous cultural causes. He is a member of the HGO Board of Directors and was the co-chair of Inspiring Performance—The Campaign for Houston Grand Opera. Over the years, the Chaos have sponsored HGO special events, the HGO Studio, HGOco’s Song of Houston, and mainstage productions. The couple has also supported the HGO Endowment through their family foundation, the Ting Tsung and Wei Fong Chao Foundation.

LOUISE G. CHAPMAN
Louise Chapman of Corpus Christi, Texas, a longtime supporter of HGO, recently joined the HGO Board of Directors. Louise’s late husband, John O. Chapman, was a south Texas agricultural businessman and philanthropist. In addition to HGO, the Chapmans have supported numerous organizations in health, education, and the arts, including Texas A & M University, the Corpus Christi Symphony, and the Art Museum of South Texas. Louise and HGO Trustee Connie Dyer have known each other since they were college roommates at The University of Texas.

THE ROBERT AND JANE CIZIK FOUNDATION
The Cizik family name is synonymous with passion, devotion, and service to the people of Houston. The Ciziks have always been associated with hard work, high achievement, inspirational leadership, and love for their family. Survived by his wife, Jane, Robert Cizik spearheaded the fundraising and building of HGO’s home, the Wortham Theater Center. The Robert and Jane Cizik Foundation gives generously to many educational institutions and charitable organizations, including UTHealth, Harvard University, the University of Houston, and the University of Connecticut. In 2017, the School of Nursing at UTHealth was re-named the Jane and Robert Cizik School of Nursing at UTHealth in recognition of the family’s dedicated support.
**MATHILDA COCHRAN**
Mathilda is a native of New Orleans and a long-time resident of Houston. She is a retired museum educator, having served for many years as Manager of the Docent and Tour Program at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, as well as a volunteer with Taping for the Blind, Inc. She and her late husband, Mike, created the Cochran Family Professorship in Earth and Environmental Sciences to support Tulane University’s School of Science and Engineering. Mathilda currently serves as a member of the HGO Board of Directors and is chair of the HGOco Committee. She has been an HGO subscriber since the 1986-87 season.

**CONOCOPHILLIPS**
For over 40 years, ConocoPhillips has supported various programs at HGO, from special events to mainstage productions, including a long-standing tradition of supporting HGO’s season-opening operas. In 2009, the company gave a major multi-year grant to establish ConocoPhillips New Initiatives, a far-reaching program that allows HGOco to develop new and innovative education and community collaboration programs. Kelly Rose, general counsel and SVP, serves on the HGO Board of Directors.

**JIM AND MOLLY CROWNOVER**
Jim Crownover was the chairman of the HGO Board of Directors 2016–18. He has been a member of the board since 1987 and has served on the Executive, Governance, Development, and Finance Committees. He and his wife, Molly, have been HGO subscribers for 30 years and are members of HGO’s Laureate Society and Impresarios Circle. In 1998, Jim retired from a 30-year career with McKinsey & Company, Inc., and currently serves on the boards of Chemtura Corporation, Weingarten Realty, Republic Services, Inc., and FTI Consulting. Jim also serves and supports the Houston Ballet, Rice University, the Houston Zoo, United Way Houston, Project Grad Houston, and a number of other organizations.

**THE CULLEN FOUNDATION**
For more than three decades, The Cullen Foundation has been a vital member of the HGO family. Established in 1947, the Foundation has more than a half-century history of giving generously to education, health care, and the arts in Texas, primarily in the Greater Houston area. The Opera is very grateful for the Foundation’s longstanding leadership support of HGO’s Family and Holiday Opera Series, as well as special support for HGO’s COVID-19 recovery efforts.

**THE CULLEN TRUST FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS**
The Cullen Trust for the Performing Arts has been a lead underwriter of HGO’s mainstage season for nearly 30 years. The Trust was established from assets of The Cullen Foundation to specifically benefit Texas performing arts institutions, particularly those within the Greater Houston area. In recent years, The Cullen Trust has provided lead support for memorable productions including HGO’s Family and Holiday Opera Series, and made a leadership contribution to HGO’s Hurricane Harvey recovery fund, as well as a generous gift to HGO’s COVID-19 recovery efforts.

**THE ELKINS FOUNDATION**
Established by Margaret Weiss Elkins and James A. Elkins Jr. in 1956, The Elkins Foundation enriches our community by supporting a wide variety of educational, healthcare, cultural, community, and religious organizations. We are honored that Jenny Elkins and her family have been part of the HGO family for decades. The Elkins Foundation allows tens of thousands of students to experience opera each season through Opera to Go! and HGOco’s other learning programs. The Foundation is also a generous supporter of HGO’s COVID-19 recovery efforts.

**DRS. LIZ GRIMM AND JACK ROTH**
HGO subscribers since the 2013–14 season, Liz and Jack have both committed themselves to cancer research and patient care through their work at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. Jack is a member of the HGO Board of Directors and serves as HGO Studio Committee Chair. Liz and Jack were generous underwriters of HGO’s historic, first-ever Ring cycle and lead supporters of HGO’s German repertoire, including Elektra. Additionally, Liz and Jack chaired the 2018 Opera Ball and will chair this season’s Concert of Arias on January 21, 2022.

**WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST FOUNDATION**
The William Randolph Hearst Foundation is a national philanthropic resource for organizations working in the fields of culture, education, health, and social services. The Foundation identifies and funds outstanding nonprofits to ensure that people of all backgrounds in the United States have the opportunity to build healthy, productive, and inspiring lives. A dedicated supporter of HGO, the Foundation is a leading advocate for HGOco. The continued support from the Foundation makes it possible for Houstonians of all ages to explore, engage, and learn through the inspiring art of opera.

**H-E-B**
For over 115 years, H-E-B has contributed to worthy causes throughout Texas and Mexico, a tradition proudly maintained today. And for over 20 years, H-E-B has been a lead supporter of HGOco’s arts education programs for Houston area students. H-E-B’s partnership helps over 70,000 young people experience the magic of opera each season. Always celebrating Houston’s cultural diversity, H-E-B helped make possible last season’s Marian’s Song and this season’s upcoming world premiere, The Snowy Day.
HOUSTON GRAND OPERA ENDOWMENT, INC.
Established and incorporated in 1982, the Houston Grand Opera Endowment (HGOE) is a vital financial management tool that ensures HGO has a reliable, regular source of income. Today, the Endowment contains over 50 named funds, both unrestricted and restricted, and annually distributes 5 percent of the Endowment’s average market value to HGO, making it the largest single annual funder of the Opera. HGOE leadership includes Chair Yolanda Knoll, Senior Chair Tom Rushing, and several members of the HGO Board of Directors.

HOUSTON LIVESTOCK SHOW AND RODEO™
For more than 15 years, the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo™ has supported HGOco’s arts education programs, helping more than one million Houston area students experience the magic of live opera through Opera to Go!, the Student Performance Series, and Storybook Opera. A 501(c)(3) charity, the Show has committed more than $500 million to the youth of Texas since 1932. The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is the world’s largest livestock show and rodeo, with more than 2.4 million attendees in 2019.

HOUSTON METHODIST
For over ten years, Houston Grand Opera has partnered with Houston Methodist, the official health care provider for HGO. Houston Methodist’s Center for Performing Arts Medicine (CPAM) is the only center of its kind in the country, comprising a specialized group of more than 100 physicians working collaboratively to address the specific demands placed upon performing artists. In addition to the first-rate medical care CPAM provides HGO artists, Houston Methodist also generously supports HGO’s mainstage season and partners frequently on HGOco collaborations. HGO is fortunate to have Dr. Warren Ellsworth and Dr. Apurva Thekdi serve as Houston Methodist’s corporate trustees.

THE HUMPHREYS FOUNDATION
Based in Liberty, Texas, the Humphreys Foundation has been a major underwriter of HGO’s mainstage season since 1980. Geraldine Davis Humphreys (d. 1961), a member of the pioneer Hardin family of Liberty, Texas, bequeathed her estate to the Humphreys Foundation, which was formally established in 1959. The Foundation provides support for performing arts in Texas and college scholarship funding for students in the arts. Linda Bertman, Louis Paine, and Robert Wall serve as trustees of the Humphreys Foundation. In recent years, the Foundation’s generous support has helped make possible unforgettable productions, unforgettable productions, such as last May’s My Favorite Things: Songs from The Sound of Music.

DONNA KAPLAN AND RICHARD LYDECKER
Richard Lydecker has been an HGO subscriber and supporter for more than three decades. He is a member of the HGO Board of Directors and Impresarios Circle. Richard has great passion for opera, especially Wagner, and he and Donna were underwriters for HGO’s Ring cycle. They are also special events sponsors, supporting Opera Ball and Concert of Arias.

CLAIRE LIU AND JOSEPH GREENBERG
Claire and Joe have subscribed to HGO for many seasons and are members of HGO’s Founders Council for Artistic Excellence. Claire serves on the HGO Board of Directors and is chair of the Finance Committee. She is newly retired from LyondellBasell Industries where she led the corporate finance team and was formerly a managing director with Bank of America. Joe is founder, president, and CEO of Alta Resources, L.L.C., a private company involved in the development of shale oil and gas resources in North America. Claire and Joe support many organizations, with particular emphasis on educational organizations including YES Prep and Teach for America. An avid runner, Claire has completed a marathon in all 50 states.

BETH MADISON
This season marks Beth's 23rd as an HGO subscriber. HGO has had the honor of her support since 2004. Past chair of the HGO Board of Directors, she currently serves on the HGO Studio Committee, and is an active member of HGO’s Founders Council. She was the honoree at the 2017 Concert of Arias. Beth generously supports the HGO Studio, special events, and mainstage operas. Beth has been inducted into the Greater Houston Women’s Hall of Fame and serves on the University of Houston System Board of Regents.

THE ROBERT AND JANICE MCNAIR FOUNDATION
Janice and the late Bob McNair, longtime HGO subscribers and supporters, are well known for their incredible philanthropy and for bringing the NFL back to Houston. Bob was a former chair of the HGO Board of Directors (1995-97). Through the family’s passionate support of students, young entrepreneurs, medical research and the community, The Robert and Janice McNair Foundation is transforming some of the biggest challenges our nation faces today into the solutions of tomorrow. As the lead supporter of HGO’s Holiday Opera Series, the McNair Foundation makes it possible for thousands of students and families to experience shorter length family-friendly operas during the holiday season each year.
M.D. ANDERSON FOUNDATION
The M.D. Anderson Foundation has provided general operating support to HGO for more than 30 years. The Foundation was established in 1936 by Monroe Dunaway Anderson, whose company, Anderson, Clayton and Co., was the world's largest cotton merchant. While the Foundation started the Texas Medical Center and was instrumental in bringing to it one of the premier cancer centers in the world, the Foundation’s trustees also looked to improve the wellness of communities through the arts. HGO is privileged to have such a longstanding and committed partner in enhancing the quality of life for all Houstonians.

THE MELLON FOUNDATION
Established in 1969, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation supports a wide range of initiatives to strengthen the humanities, arts, higher education, and cultural heritage. The driving force behind so many of HGO’s new commissions, The Mellon Foundation’s longstanding support of HGO helps us tell relevant new stories and add to the operatic repertoire by developing new works, like Joel Thompson and Andrea Davis Pinkney’s The Snowy Day.

SID MOORHEAD
Sid Moorhead is the owner of Moorhead’s Blueberry Farm in Conroe, Texas, a family business that started as his father’s hobby over 40 years ago. After working for several years as a computer analyst, Sid left the corporate world to run the farm. He’s been an opera lover since he was in college, and he joined the Opera as an HGO Trustee in 2014. Now a member of the HGO Board of Directors who served as chair of Concert of Arias 2021, Sid enjoys traveling to experience opera around the world on our HGO Patron trips. We’re thrilled to have Sid as a valued member of our HGO family.

SARA AND BILL MORGAN
Sara and Bill have been supporting HGO since 2002. Sara is a co-founder of the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, where she currently serves on the board. Bill is a co-founder of the Kinder Morgan companies and the retired vice chairman and president of Kinder Morgan, Inc., and Kinder Morgan Energy Partners, LP. The Morgans support HGOoco, HGO’s special events, and mainstage productions, including the Holiday Opera Series. HGO is thrilled to have Sara serve on the HGO Board of Directors and as a member and past chair of the HGOoco Committee.

NOVUM ENERGY
Founded in 2011 in Panama, Novum Energy is an international physical oil supply and trading company committed to industry excellence in delivery standards and customer service. Founder and President Alfredo Vilas serves on the HGO Board of Directors and has over 20 years of experience and a passion for service to the community through cultural, recreational, and philanthropic work.

BEVERLY AND STAMAN OGILVIE
HGO subscribers since 1997, Beverly and Staman Ogilvie are true advocates for HGO and the performing arts. Staman is the former Chief Executive Officer of Hines, and is responsible for the development, acquisition, and management of more than 29 million square feet of commercial real estate as well as several thousand acres of planned community developments. Beverly previously served on the HGO Studio Committee. In addition to their commitment to the performing arts, Staman and Beverly established The Staman Ogilvie Fund for Spinal Cord Injury Recovery, Rehabilitation, and Research with Memorial Hermann Foundation. The fund has raised over $10 million toward innovative research to restore function for individuals suffering from spinal cord injuries. The Ogilvies also provided critical support in response to HGO’s COVID-19 recovery efforts.

JILL AND ALLYN RISLEY
Jill and Allyn Risley have been HGO subscribers since the 2003-04 season and are members of the company’s Founders Council. Allyn and Jill have been key influencers of HGO programs for many years, with special affection for our esteemed HGO Studio. They co-sponsor HGO Studio Artist Eric Taylor and faculty member Dr. Stephen King, Director of Vocal Instruction. Allyn is Chairman of Gaztransport & Technigaz (GTT) North America, an engineering company specializing in liquid gas containment systems using cryogenics. Allyn has served as Chair of the HGO Board of Directors since August 2020.

SCHLUMBERGER
Schlumberger is a leading corporate contributor to HGO, supporting the main stage and a wide range of special projects over nearly 20 years. Schlumberger’s leadership gift was integral to launching HGO’s ongoing affordability program, the NEXUS Initiative, in 2007—since then, NEXUS has made great opera accessible to more than 275,000 people. HGO is honored to count Schlumberger among its most dedicated corporate supporters. Fred Dyen, Cameron Group HR director, serves on the HGO Board of Directors.
**SHELL**

Shell is a leader in the Houston arts community, supporting HGO for over 40 years. Shell’s leadership support makes opera more accessible to everyone through the NEXUS Initiative for Affordability and inspires young minds with STEM-aligned arts education opportunities like our annual Opera Camps. Shell was also a major supporter of HGO’s Hurricane Harvey recovery. HGO is honored to have Christos Angelides, external relations general manager of integrated gas ventures, as a Trustee.

**DIAN AND HARLAN STAÏ**

Harlan, a member of the HGO Board of Directors, and Dian are charter members of HGO’s Founders Council for Artistic Excellence, and their leadership support includes mainstage productions, the HGO Studio, the HGO Endowment, and special events. The Stais have also sponsored HGO Studio artists and they host annual recitals featuring HGO Studio artists at Mansefeldt, their renowned Fredericksburg ranch. HGO was privileged to recognize Dian and Harlan as the honorees of Opening Night 2008 and the 2014 Concert of Arias.

**TEXAS COMMISSION ON THE ARTS**

The mission of the Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA) is to advance our state economically and culturally by investing in creative projects and programs. TCA supports a diverse and innovative arts community in the state, throughout the nation, and internationally by providing resources to enhance economic development, arts education, cultural tourism, and artist sustainability initiatives. Over the years, TCA has provided invaluable support to many HGO projects, including mainstage productions and HGOco education initiatives.

**JOHN G. TURNER & JERRY G. FISCHER**

John and Jerry, based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, travel around the world to experience the best that opera has to offer. HGO subscribers and donors for over a decade, the couple’s leadership support of Wagner’s Ring cycle (2014–17) was the largest gift ever made to HGO for a single production. John, a shareholder at Turner Industries Group, is a member of the HGO Board of Directors and past chair of the HGO Studio Committee. Jerry is a board member of Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra. In recent years, John and Jerry have supported HGO mainstage productions, the HGO Studio, and special events. They are members of the Founders Council for Artistic Excellence, and John is a member of HGO’s Laureate Society.

**VINSON & ELKINS LLP**

HGO has been privileged to have the support of international law firm Vinson & Elkins LLP for nearly three decades. For more than 100 years, Vinson & Elkins LLP has been deeply committed to empowering the communities in which it serves. It has enriched the cultural vibrancy of Houston by supporting HGO through in-kind legal services and contributions to special events and mainstage productions, including this season’s Live from The Cullen recital featuring Reginald Smith Jr. The Opera is honored to have two Vinson & Elkins LLP partners serve on its board of directors: from left, Chris Bacon and Glen A. Rosenbaum.

**MARGARET ALKEK WILLIAMS**

Margaret, a longtime singer, possesses a deep affinity for all music, and especially opera, supporting HGO for over 30 years. Currently, Margaret continues her parents’ legacy as chairman of their foundation, where her son Charles A. Williams serves as president. HGO is humbled by Margaret’s incredible generosity and dedication to the company, both as an individual donor and through her family’s foundation. She has endowed the Margaret Alkek Williams Chair, held by HGO General Director Khori Dastoor, and is a member of HGO’s Laureate Society. A valued member of the HGO Board of Directors, Margaret was the honoree of the 2009 Opera Ball and chairman of the 2014 Ball, and she generously chaired the 2018 Hurricane Harvey benefit Concert HGO and Plácido: Coming Home!

**THE WORTHAM FOUNDATION, INC.**

In the 1980s, the Wortham Foundation contributed $20 million to lead the capital campaign for the Wortham Theater Center, guided by businessman Gus S. Wortham’s early recognition of the vital role of the arts in making Houston an appealing place to live and work. During their lifetimes, Gus and his wife, Lyndall, were dedicated to improving the lives of Houstonians. The Foundation continues to support the Opera through the Wortham Foundation Permanent Endowment and generous annual operating support. This leadership support has been vital to HGO’s growth and commitment to excellence. The Wortham Foundation’s support of HGO’s Hurricane Harvey recovery helped to bring the company back home, and we are deeply grateful.
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Lynn’s generosity touches every aspect of HGO. She is a Lifetime Trustee of HGO and serves as the vice chairman of the HGO Board of Directors. She chaired HGO’s Golden Jubilee Gala in 2005. Oscar Wyatt endowed The Lynn Wyatt Great Artist Fund in 2010, honoring Lynn’s service to the company and dedication to bringing the world’s best operatic artists to HGO, and she was the honoree at the 2010 Opera Ball. Lynn and Oscar have been lead supporters of a number of HGO productions and programs, including the multiyear company-wide initiative Seeking the Human Spirit.

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Eleanor Searle McCollum
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ENCORE: OPERA BALL AFTER PARTY
SATURDAY, APRIL 9, 2022, 10 P.M.
Tami Hiraoka and Louis Borrega, chairs
The chic late-night party that tops off Opera Ball and turns on the dance floor.
The Wortham Theater Center. Black or White Tie. HGO.org/ENCORE

OPENING NIGHT DINNER CELEBRATION
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2021, 7 P.M.
Betty and Jess B. Tutor, chairs
Performance of Bizet’s Carmen followed by a celebration dinner on the Wortham’s Ray C. Fish Plaza. Black Tie.
HGO.org/OpeningNight

CONCERT OF ARIAS
FRIDAY, JANUARY 21, 2022, 7 P.M.
Drs. Liz Grimm and Jack Roth, chairs
The live finals of the annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers, followed by a celebration dinner in the Grand Foyer, Wortham Theater Center. Cocktail. HGO.org/COA

OPERA BALL 2022: LE VOYAGE À MARRAKECH
SATURDAY, APRIL 9, 2022, 6:30 P.M.
Jennifer and Benjamin Fink, chairs
Teresa and José Ivo, auction chairs
Houston’s most notable leaders and tastemakers gather for an exquisite evening featuring cocktails, dinner, entertainment, dancing, and a highly curated silent auction. The Wortham Theater Center. White Tie. HGO.org/OperaBall

HGO.ORG/SPECIALEVENTS
BROOKE ROGERS | 713-546-0271 | BROGERS@HGO.ORG
SAVE THE DATES

OCTOBER 9, 10, 16, 17
HGOco presents Songs on the Water at Buffalo Bayou Park. 4-5 p.m. and 6-7 p.m. each day.

OCTOBER 22
Opening Night Dinner: HGO celebrates the return of live grand opera and the 2021-22 season following the opening performance of Bizet's Carmen. Wortham Theater Center. Betty and Jess B. Tutor, Chairs. For information, contact Brooke Rogers at brogers@hgo.org or 713-546-0271. HGO.org/OpeningNight

OCTOBER 22, 24M, 28, 30, NOVEMBER 3, 5, 6, 7M
Performances of Bizet’s Carmen. Wortham Theater Center’s Brown Theater.

OCTOBER 26
High School Night: HGOco hosts high school students and their chaperones at a full-length performance of Bizet’s Carmen. School groups only. Wortham Theater Center’s Brown Theater, 7 p.m. Visit HGO.org/StudentPerformances to reserve.

NOVEMBER 11, 14
HGO Studio Recital Series: Artists of the HGO Studio perform in the intimate and elegant salon at Rienzi, the decorative arts wing of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, at 1406 Kirby Drive. 7:30 p.m. November 11; 5 p.m. November 14.

NOVEMBER 12
HGO Digital: Studio Showcase: The live audience for this annual event was limited, but you can still enjoy the performances by the talented members of the HGO Studio at HGODigital.org. Streams through December 12. Free.

THROUGH DECEMBER 17
The Barber of Seville in Texas: HGOco and Opera to Go! present a virtual version of Kristine McIntyre’s bilingual adaptation of Gioachino Rossini’s classic comic opera, now set in Texas. Recommended for children in grades 2-8. To schedule a screening or book a teaching artist to lead a screening of this new HGOco performance at your school, library, or community center, visit HGO.org/OperaToGo or email operatogo@hgo.org.

NOVEMBER 14
HGOco presents a Holiday Singalong at the JCC focused on The Snowy Day. 3-5 p.m.

DECEMBER 4
HGOco presents singers from the Bauer Family High School Voice Studio in a masterclass with an HGO artist. 10:30 a.m. Free; public invited; class will stream online. Contact Alisa Magallón at amagallon@hgo.org for information.

DECEMBER 10

DECEMBER 11
HGOco presents Holiday in the Tré, a singalong at Emancipation Park.

DECEMBER 15
Student Matinee: HGOco hosts groups of students in grades 4-8 and their chaperones at performances of Joel Thompson and Andrea Davis Pinkney’s The Snowy Day. 10 a.m. School groups only: reserve online at HGO.org/StudentPerformances.

For more performances and events, in person and virtual, visit HGO.org!
### Houston Grand Opera Management & Staff

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<thead>
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<th>Name</th>
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<td>Interim Director of HGOco</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Brian Speck</td>
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<tr>
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Houston Grand Opera offers a wealth of services to enhance your opera experience.

Want to brush up on the opera before you attend? Need directions to the theater? This information and much more is available on our website where you can also purchase tickets and make a donation: HGO.org.

HGO’s Customer Care Center is another great resource. For performance information, to purchase or exchange tickets, or to make a donation to HGO, contact the Customer Care Center at 713-228-6737. You can also email customercare@hgo.org. Throughout the season, the Center will be staffed Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. During performance runs, the Center is open until 6 p.m., and on performance days, it is open until curtain time. The Center will be open on Saturdays and Sundays only when there is a performance, from noon until curtain. Hours are subject to change.

You can purchase tickets and make exchanges in person at the HGO Box Office, located in the Wortham Theater Center at 550 Prairie. Hours are Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. If there is a performance on Saturday or Sunday, the Box Office will be open from noon until curtain. Hours are subject to change.

BROWN AND CULLEN ALCOVES
The Wortham Theater Center’s alcoves were designed with your comfort in mind. Step inside one of these golden-hued spaces in the Grand Foyer, and you’ll find a calm place to reflect on the evening’s performance over dinner or drinks.

EXCHANGING YOUR TICKETS
Full-season and mini-package subscribers may exchange their tickets for a different performance of the same opera without fee, subject to availability. Exchanges can be made by phone until the performance begins. Non-subscription single tickets may be exchanged with a service fee of $10 per ticket. When exchanged for tickets of greater value, the customer will be responsible for the difference; no refunds will be made. No exchanges are permitted after the performance has begun.

LOST OR MISPLACED TICKETS
There is no charge for replacing lost tickets. Call the Customer Care Center at 713-228-6737 to request replacement tickets. They will be reprinted and held at the Will Call window for your performance.

PATRONS WITH DISABILITIES
The Wortham Theater Center features wheelchair access to both theaters with a choice of seating locations and ticket prices. An FM assistive listening device, generously provided by the Houston First Corporation, is available for use free of charge at all performances. Please call the Customer Care Center at 713-228-6737 for full details.

Descriptive services for persons with vision loss are available with 48-hour advance reservations. Please call 713-980-8662 for details.

PARKING
Valet parking is a benefit of membership for Patrons Circle donors; the valet station is located on Prairie Street. If you would like information about membership at this level, please contact a member of HGO’s Development staff at 713-546-0704, or e-mail us at donorservices@hgo.org.

If you have a state-issued disability permit and need valet parking, you may purchase special passes by contacting the Customer Care Center. Parking spots for disabled ticket holders are also available in the Theater District Garage on a first-come, first-served basis.

Parking in the Theater District Parking Garage is $12 on weekends and after 5 p.m. on weekdays. Clearance for trucks and vans is 6’8”.

The recommended entrances for the Theater District Garage are on Prairie or Texas between Bagby and Smith. The recommended entrances for the Alley Theatre Garage are on Smith or Louisiana between Texas and Prairie.

HGO AND SAFETY
It is wonderful to be back with you at the Wortham Theater Center. As we get back to live opera on the mainstage, the safety of our audience, cast, creative team, union members, technicians, and staff remains our top priority.

As a reminder, for performances during HGO’s fall repertoire, there are new protocols in place throughout the theater for the protection of all, created with guidance from the HGO Health Committee, local health officials, and the Centers for Disease Control:

• All guests attending HGO performances and events will be required to wear a mask covering the nose and mouth while inside the Wortham Theater Center, including while seated for a performance.

• The Green Room will remain closed throughout the fall.

• Enhanced cleaning procedures are in place throughout the building.

• The building has been equipped with additional hand sanitizing stations, upgraded air ventilation, and increased touchless amenities.

Thank you for adhering to HGO’s safety procedures!

Our Advice.

Built on strength, stability and a well-established track record.

Let’s Start a Conversation
Need to discuss financial planning, investment management or estate and trust questions? We can help you navigate financial complexity. Contact us to meet with a private wealth advisor.

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DON'T MISS THIS WORLD PREMIERE!

MUSIC BY JOEL THOMPSON
LIBRETTO BY ANDREA DAVIS PINKNEY

The Snowy Day
BASED ON THE SNOWY DAY, A BOOK BY EZRA JACK KEATS

DECEMBER 9–19, 2021
Sung in English with projected English translation

Let yourself take a snow day

Relive the joy and wonder of childhood with a story as fresh and lovely as a new coat of snow. Ezra Jack Keats’s award-winning, ever popular work from 1962, The Snowy Day, was the first mainstream children’s book to feature a Black boy as its protagonist.

The story comes to life for the holidays in this anticipated world premiere opera from the brilliant creative duo of composer Joel Thompson and librettist Andrea Davis Pinkney. Join Peter, a young boy out exploring the city alone for the first time, as he experiences the delights of crunching, sliding, and playing in a fresh snowfall and, along the way, learns some truths about life.

HGO Studio artist and soprano Raven McMillon takes on the role of Peter, and director Omer Ben Seadia brings the wonder and magic of the boy’s wintry world to life. HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers conducts.

To purchase tickets, call the Customer Care Center at 713-228-6737 or visit HGO.org.
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