Subject: Houston Grand Opera's 2013–14 season
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Houston Grand Opera Begins First *Ring* Cycle and Offers American and World Premieres in Expanded 2013–14 Season

48 Performances of Eight Operas including American premiere of Holocaust opera *The Passenger*

Houston Grand Opera's (HGO) 2013–14 season includes the launch of the company's **first *Ring* cycle**, in a visionary and captivating production by the Catalan company **La Fura dels Baus**; the hotly anticipated **American premiere** of Mieczyslaw Weinberg's Holocaust opera *The Passenger*; the **world premiere** of Ricky Ian Gordon's *A Coffin in Egypt*, based on the play of the same name by renowned Texas writer Horton Foote and starring iconic mezzo-soprano **Frederica von Stade**; a **new HGO production of** *Carmen* from Broadway sensation Rob Ashford; revivals of *Aida*, *Rigoletto*, and *Die Fledermaus*; and, in tribute to the nation's homegrown musical theater tradition, Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music* designed by fashion star Isaac Mizrahi. Through its HGOco *Song of Houston* project—winner of the National MultiCultural Institute's Leading Lights Diversity Award—the company continues to celebrate Houston's cultural diversity with the **world premieres of two new commissions** exploring the city's Vietnamese and Indian communities as part of the **East + West** series.

These rich offerings reflect both HGO's legacy of artistic excellence and the success this has engendered. In each of the last two seasons, HGO's audiences have come from all 50 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico, as well as from at least 23 foreign countries to experience the company's unique artistic vision. Public demand for tickets has increased drastically—as evidenced by a 35 percent increase in subscription sales since 2007, allowing HGO to dramatically increase the size of its season for the second straight year. The company will present 48 performances of eight operas in 2013–14, an increase of 45 percent over its 2011–12 season, which included 33 performances of six operas.

In addition to its productions in the Wortham Theater Center, HGO will also present free outdoor performances of ***Die Fledermaus*** at Miller Outdoor Theatre in Hermann Park.

HGO main-stage productions are also heard locally in the Houston area on KUHA-FM and nationally on the WFMT radio network.

Discussing the upcoming season, HGO Artistic and Music Director **Patrick Summers** explains, "Launching a *Ring* cycle is a landmark for any opera company, but we are also continuing our commitment to be a passionate voice for our city and our time. Above all, we believe that this season abounds with the visceral and moving experiences that opera alone can provide."

"With our expansion to 48 performances of eight operas we are building on the momentum of the last few seasons," adds HGO Managing Director **Perryn Leech**. "We are delighted that more people are experiencing the exceptional quality and excitement of HGO's work."

Ring cycle begins with *Das Rheingold*

Marking an important company milestone, the new season sees HGO launch its first presentation of Wagner's monumental ***Ring* cycle**, in a production from **La Fura dels Baus**, the genre-defying Catalan theater company behind Barcelona's 1992 Olympic opening ceremony. Previously staged only in Europe, this dazzling production has been called "a veritable symphony in pictures" (*Opera News*). Highlights from the production, which was released on DVD by C Major Entertainment and won the 2010 ECHO Klassik Award for DVD of the year, can be seen here.

Over the next four seasons, HGO will present one installment of the cycle each year, starting in April 2014 with ***Das Rheingold***. Heading the outstanding cast is Scottish bass-baritone **Iain Paterson** making his house debut in his first performances as Wotan. Singing opposite him as Fricka is American mezzo **Jamie Barton**, an HGO Studio alumna and recent winner of both the **BBC's Cardiff Singer of the World Competition** and **World Song Prize**, and Slovak

tenor **Stefan Margita** reprises the role of Loge. **Patrick Summers**, who made his Wagner debut in 2009 with *Lohengrin* at HGO, will lead from the pit.

American premiere: Weinberg's *The Passenger*

No less momentous is the **American premiere** of ***The Passenger***, by exiled Polish-Jewish composer **Mieczyslaw Weinberg**. Based on the eponymous novel by Auschwitz survivor Zofia Posmysz, *The Passenger* is set in the late 1950s and depicts a German couple, Liese and Walter, on board an ocean liner where former SS officer Liese thinks she recognizes an Auschwitz prisoner among their fellow passengers. Although Weinberg completed his score in 1968, the opera was not performed until 2006. It was not fully staged until the 2010 Bregenz Festival, at which time the *New York Times* observed:

> The work was brilliantly served by **David Pountney**'s production. **Johan Engels**'s two-level set, with the ship above and the camp below—bleakly characterized by railroad tracks and wooden bunks—facilitated the shift in action from one to the other. **Marie-Jeanne Lecca**'s realistic costumes, which dressed all those on board ship in white, heightened the contrast.

In January 2014, this production comes to Houston, once again starring South African mezzo **Michelle Breedt** in the role she created in Austria. She will be joined by Canadian tenor **Joseph Kaiser**, best known as Tamino in Kenneth Branagh's film adaptation of *The Magic Flute*. Patrick Summers will conduct.

Further examining the themes explored in *The Passenger*, HGOco will present a number of activities and programs throughout Houston focused on remembrance of the past and connection to the present through music, community conversation, and art. A series of **three free concerts** begins on **November 10** with the world premiere of a new work by HGO Studio alumnus and composer David Hanlon, commemorating the 75th anniversary of Kristallnacht and based on the story of his grandfather, one of the thousands of Jewish people arrested on that infamous night and sent to Dachau. The series continues on **December 9** with a concert exploring the music, art, poetry, and philosophy that emerged from Terezín, a concentration camp located in the Czech Republic. The third and final performance on **February 22** features music of memory and hope with **world premieres** of works by **Lawrence Siegel** and **Paul English** based on text and inspiration from **Holocaust survivor Naomi Warren**.

World Premiere: *A Coffin in Egypt*

HGO is also proud to present the **first in a series of new operas** commissioned by the company: **Ricky Ian Gordon's *A Coffin in Egypt***, with a libretto by **Leonard Foglia**, who will also direct the premiere. One of the world's most beloved opera stars, mezzo-soprano **Frederica von Stade**, headlines this moving monodrama. "This new opera has deep Texas roots," says Summers. "It is based on a play of the same name by the renowned Texas writer Horton Foote. Ricky Ian Gordon is a very theatrically driven composer with a style that is perfectly suited to opera." Houston Grand Opera's legacy of commissioning and premiering new works goes back more than 40 years, and includes commissions from John Adams, Philip Glass, Daniel Catán, André Previn, Mark Adamo, and Jake Heggie, among others. *A Coffin in Egypt* will mark HGO's **52nd world premiere** since 1973.

New Production: *Carmen*

In April 2014, HGO breathes fresh life into Bizet's perennially popular ***Carmen*** with the help of American director/choreographer **Rob Ashford**. "Rob Ashford is Broadway's hottest young director," notes Summers, "and we are looking forward to Rob's take on an iconic classic." A Tony, Emmy, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle Award winner—with nominations for a further seven Tonys and five Olivier awards—Ashford needs little introduction on Broadway or in London's West End.

"I am thrilled to be making my HGO debut with *Carmen*," says Ashford. "I've always loved this score and look forward to exploring its strong flamenco rhythms and influence. It is a very exciting opportunity."

In her role debut as Bizet's irrepressible Gypsy, the new production presents Grammy Award–winning Puerto Rican soprano **Ana María Martínez**. As an alumna of the HGO Studio, Martínez was the inaugural recipient of the Lynn

Wyatt Great Artist Award. Opposite her, Richard Tucker Award–winner **Brandon Jovanovich** portrays Don José. Their doomed love triangle is completed by the Escamillo of bass-baritone **Ryan McKinny**, another former HGO Studio artist and the first recipient of Plácido Domingo's Birgit Nilsson Prize. Scotland's **Rory Macdonald** will conduct.

Sondheim's *A Little Night Music* designed by Isaac Mizrahi

Described by the *New York Times* as "the greatest and perhaps best-known artist in the American musical theater," **Stephen Sondheim** is the winner of a Pulitzer Prize, an Olivier Award, an Academy Award, seven Tony awards, a Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement, and multiple Grammy awards. The upcoming production of his intimate chamber piece ***A Little Night Music*** demonstrates HGO's ongoing commitment to musical theater, America's original contribution to the operatic genre. In March 2014, the company will revive the staging with which **Isaac Mizrahi** made his directorial debut, and about which the *Wall Street Journal* concluded: "No surprise that Mr. Mizrahi's costumes were enchanting; he also brought a light touch to the directing, never pushing the comedy into slapstick or the romance into bathos. It was all charming and very effective." Headlining the revival are American soprano **Elizabeth Futral**; HGO Studio alumnus and company regular **Chad Shelton**, tenor; and American mezzo **Joyce Castle**, who was chosen by the composer himself to record "Send in the Clowns" for the Book-of-the-Month collection *Sondheim*. Musical direction is by HGO's own associate music director, **Eric Melear**, Sir Georg Solti Foundation Award winner and a former HGO Studio artist.

Aida*, *Rigoletto*, and *Die Fledermaus

Aida, the first of HGO's upcoming Verdi revivals, opens the 2013–14 season in October. Featuring sets and costumes by British fashion designer **Zandra Rhodes**, this production is suitably larger than life. In the title role, HGO is thrilled to present **Liudmyla Monastyrska**, the star of the Ukraine National Opera, who recently played Aida to great acclaim in her first U.S. appearances at the Met. Powerhouse mezzo **Dolora Zajick** sings her signature role of Amneris, while Texas baritone and HGO Studio alumnus **Scott Hendricks** sings Aida's father, Amonasro. Italy's **Antonino Fogliani**, a specialist in the music of his homeland, conducts. *Aida* marks the first collaboration between HGO and Houston-based **Dominic Walsh Dance Company**, whose work has been praised by dance cognoscenti nationwide. The company will perform dance sequences in *Aida* choreographed by Walsh.

In January, the company will also revive Verdi's ***Rigoletto*** in a production remounted by original director **Harry Silverstein** and conducted by **Patrick Summers**. Ryan McKinny returns to sing his first Rigoletto, while Richard Tucker Award-winning tenor **Stephen Costello** makes his long-awaited HGO debut as the Duke of Mantua.

For the first time in 30 years, HGO produces ***Die Fledermaus*** by Viennese "waltz king" Johann Strauss II. In an Art Deco–style concept by Australian director **Lindy Hume**, the operetta is transported from imperial Austria-Hungary to 1930s Manhattan and was dubbed "the perfect entertainment" by the *Sydney Morning Herald*. HGO Studio alumnus **Liam Bonner** makes his role debut as Eisenstein, and soprano **Wendy Bryn Harmer** sings her first Rosalinde. **Susan Graham**, HGO's Lynn Wyatt Great Artist for 2013–14, sings one of her celebrated trouser roles as Prince Orlovsky. Soprano **Laura Claycomb** portrays Adele, and four-time Grammy Award–winner **Anthony Dean Griffey** sings his first Alfred. **Thomas Rösner**—Vienna-born-and-bred—conducts.

HGO expands this exciting **2013–14** line-up with two more **world premiere** productions through its ***Song of Houston*** initiative, which commissions works based on stories that define the unique character of Houston. The program debuts two new chamber operas in its **East + West** series, which celebrates Houston as a meeting place for Eastern and Western cultures. Timed to coincide with the Vietnamese Lunar New Year celebrations, the first piece will premiere in January 2014. With the working title *Bound*, it is the creation of librettist **Bao-Long Chu** and composer **Huang Ruo**, a Luxembourg International Composition Prize winner. The second work is slated for March 2014, in conjunction with the Indian festival of Holi. With a libretto by American Book Award–winner **Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni**, this marks the second contribution to **East + West** by composer **Jack Perla**, whose China-themed *Courtside* premiered in 2011. These operas represent HGO's **51st and 53rd world premieres**.

Houston Grand Opera: 2013–14 season

* HGO debut
† HGO Studio artist
‡ Former HGO Studio artist

Giuseppe Verdi: *Aida*
Oct 18, 20m, 26, 29. Nov 1, 3m, 9, 2013
Aida: Liudmyla Monastyrska *
Radamès: Riccardo Massi * / Issachah Savage *
Amneris: Dolora Zajick
Amonasro: Scott Hendricks ‡
Ramfis: Ain Anger *
Conductor: Antonino Fogliani
Production: Jo Davies
Director: Jose Maria Condemi *
Set and Costume Designer: Zandra Rhodes
Lighting Designer: Michael James Clark
Choreographer: Dominic Walsh *
Chorus Master: Richard Bado ‡

A co-production of Houston Grand Opera, English National Opera, San Francisco Opera, and Norwegian National Opera

Johann Strauss II: *Die Fledermaus*
Oct 25, 27m, Nov 2, 8, 10m
Eisenstein: Liam Bonner ‡
Rosalinde: Wendy Bryn Harmer *
Adele: Laura Claycomb
Prince Orlovsky: Susan Graham
Alfred: Anthony Dean Griffey
Dr. Falke: Samuel Schultz
Frank: Michael Sumuel ‡
Frosch / Bellboy / Waiter: Jason Graae
Conductor: Thomas Rösner
Director: Lindy Hume
Set Designer: Richard Roberts *
Costume Designer: Angus Strathie *
Lighting Designer: Michael James Clark
Choreographer / Associate Director: Daniel Pelzig
Chorus Master: Richard Bado ‡

An original production by Opera Australia, owned by Opéra de Montréal

Mieczyslaw Weinberg: *The Passenger* (American premiere)
Jan 18, 22, 25, 31; Feb 2m, 2014
Liese: Michelle Breedt *
Walter: Joseph Kaiser
Marta: Melody Moore
Tadeusz: Morgan Smith *
Katya: Kelly Kaduce *
Bronka: Kathryn Day *
Conductor: Patrick Summers
Director: David Pountney

Set Designer: Johan Engels
Costume Designer: Marie-Jeanne Lecca
Lighting Designer: Fabrice Kebour *
Associate Director: Rob Kearley *
Chorus Master: Richard Bado ‡

A co-production of Bregenzer Festspiele, Austria; Teatr Wielki, Warsaw; English National Opera, London; and Teatro Real, Madrid

Giuseppe Verdi: *Rigoletto*
Jan 24, 26m, 29; Feb 1, 7, 9m
Rigoletto: Ryan McKinny ‡
Duke of Mantua: Stephen Costello *
Gilda: Elizabeth Zharoff *
Count Monterone: Robert Pomakov
Sparafucile: Dmitry Belosselskiy *
Maddalena: Carolyn Sproule †
Conductor: Patrick Summers
Director: Harry Silverstein
Set Designer: Michael Yeargan
Costume Designer: Peter J. Hall
Lighting Designer: Stephen Strawbridge
Chorus Master: Richard Bado ‡

A co-production of Houston Grand Opera and The Dallas Opera

Stephen Sondheim: *A Little Night Music*
March 7, 9m, 13, 15, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23m
Desiree Armfeldt: Elizabeth Futral
Fredrik Egerman: Chad Shelton ‡
Count Carl-Magnus: Mark Diamond ‡
Countess Charlotte: Carolyn Sproule †
Madame Armfeldt: Joyce Castle
Anne Egerman: Andrea Carroll †
Henrik Egerman: Brenton Ryan *
Petra: Alicia Gianni ‡
Conductor: Eric Melear ‡
Original Director, Set and Costume Designer: Isaac Mizrahi *
Revival Director: Matthew Ozawa
Lighting Designer: Brian Nason

An original production of Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, owned by Houston Grand Opera

Ricky Ian Gordon and Leonard Foglia: *A Coffin in Egypt* (World Premiere)
March 14, 16m, 21
Myrtle Bledsoe: Frederica von Stade
Composer: Ricky Ian Gordon
Librettist/Director: Leonard Foglia
Conductor: Timothy Myers
Set and Costume Designer: Riccardo Hernández
Lighting Designer: Brian Nason

A co-production and co-commission of Houston Grand Opera, Opera Philadelphia, and the Wallis Annenberg Center for

the Performing Arts

Richard Wagner: *Das Rheingold*
April 11, 13m, 17, 23, 26
Wotan: Iain Paterson *
Loge: Stefan Margita
Alberich: Christopher Purves
Mime: Rodell Rosel
Fricka: Jamie Barton ‡
Erda: Meredith Arwady
Fasolt: Kristinn Sigmundsson
Fafner: Andrea Silvestrelli
Conductor: Patrick Summers
Director: Carlus Padrissa *
Set Designer: Roland Olbeter *
Costume Designer: Chu Uroz *
Lighting Designer: Peter Van Praet *
Video Designer: Franc Aleu *
Associate Director: Esteban Muñoz *

A co-production of Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia, Valencia, and Maggio Musicale, Florence

Georges Bizet: *Carmen* (new production)
April 25, 27m, 30; May 2, 4m, 8, 10
Carmen: Ana María Martínez ‡
Don José: Brandon Jovanovich
Escamillo: Ryan McKinny ‡
Micaëla: Natalya Romaniw †
Conductor: Rory Macdonald
Director: Rob Ashford *
Set Designer: David Rockwell *
Costume Designer: Julie Weiss *
Lighting Designer: Donald Holder
Chorus Master: Richard Bado ‡
Children's Chorus Director: Karen Reeves

A co-production of Houston Grand Opera, San Francisco Opera, and Lyric Opera of Chicago

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High-resolution production photos and headshots can be found at HoustonGrandOpera.org/press

Username and password: hgopress

Since its inception in 1955, Houston Grand Opera has grown from a small regional organization into an internationally renowned opera company. HGO enjoys a reputation for commissioning and producing new works, including fifty world premieres and six American premieres since 1973. In addition to producing and

performing world-class opera, HGO contributes to the cultural enrichment of Houston and the nation through a diverse and innovative program of performances, community events, and education projects that reaches the widest possible public. HGO has toured extensively, including trips to Europe and Asia, and it is the only opera company to have won a Tony, two Grammy awards, and two Emmy awards. HGO's performances are broadcast nationally over the WFMT Radio Network.

Through HGOco, Houston Grand Opera creates opportunities for Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to observe, participate in, and create art. Its *Song of Houston* project is an ongoing initiative to create and share work based on stories that define the unique character of our city and its diverse cultures. Since 2007, HGOco has commissioned thirteen new works along with countless innovative community projects, reaching more than 900,000 people in the greater Houston metropolitan area.