



## Houston Grand Opera Announces its 2023-24 Season

**HGO's New Season to Feature Six Operas, Including a Highly Anticipated World Premiere, Wagner's Final Masterpiece, a New Staging of a Family-Friendly Classic, and Beloved Audience Favorites**

*The new season includes the world premiere of superstar composer Jake Heggie's **Intelligence**; its second-ever **Parsifal**; a new co-production of **The Sound of Music**; and three popular favorites, **Falstaff**, **Madame Butterfly**, and **Don Giovanni***

"Next season's theme surrounds finding truth within art." —Khorī Dastoor, HGO General Director & CEO

HOUSTON—March 21, 2023—**Houston Grand Opera** (HGO) is proud to announce its 2023-24 season, featuring a season-opening, world premiere opera based on a little-known true story of the Civil War, *Intelligence*; the company's first presentation of Wagner's *Parsifal* since 1992; a new staging of *The Sound of Music* co-produced by HGO and the Glimmerglass Festival; and popular classic operas *Falstaff*, *Madame Butterfly*, and *Don Giovanni*.

"Next season's theme surrounds finding truth within art," says HGO General Director and CEO **Khorī Dastoor**. "These operas are united by the complexity of their musical languages, the maturity of their themes, and the immutable truths contained within their stories. Only in opera do we see the truthful representation of multiple art forms, multiple points of view, and a wide diversity of perspectives co-existing in one moment. That complexity is the essence of the human condition. Opera can be ridiculous at times, but it is always honest."

"The dreams of next season, with its mix of newness and comforting familiarity, will be brought to life by a roster of artists and creatives so prodigiously talented, it truly takes your breath away," says HGO Artistic and Music Director **Patrick Summers**. "These are monumental works of art, whether they were gifted to us by history's great geniuses or the most brilliant creators of the current day. From the great new American story of *Intelligence*; to the burst of truthful human laughter that ended Verdi's long and historic career, *Falstaff*; to the familiar Italian operas influenced by dozens of other cultures, *Madame Butterfly* and *Don Giovanni*; to the more ancient mystical beauties of *Parsifal*—there is a journey for everyone."

For the first time in its history, HGO will open its 2023-24 season with a world premiere: the company-commissioned opera *Intelligence*, created by acclaimed composer **Jake Heggie**, librettist **Gene Scheer**, and director/choreographer **Jawole Willa Jo Zollar**, 2021 MacArthur Fellow and founder of the **Urban Bush Women**, the renowned Brooklyn dance company that centers the perspective of Black women.

Shared through a fusion of music, words, and dance and inspired by historic events, *Intelligence* tells the story of two women—Elizabeth Van Lew, from a prominent Confederate family, and Mary Jane Bowser, born into slavery in the family's household—who form a secret pro-Union spy ring. As they change the course of history together, Mary Jane uncovers secrets of her own history and identity. The sensational cast will be led by mezzo-soprano Sarah and Ernest Butler Houston Grand Opera Studio alumna **Jamie Barton** as Elizabeth and soprano **Janai Brugger** in her company debut as Mary Jane. They will be joined by eight dancers from the Urban Bush Women in their HGO debut, with acclaimed conductor **Kwamé Ryan** also making his company debut at the podium.

The other opera from HGO's fall repertoire is Verdi's comic masterpiece, *Falstaff*, which recounts the drunken misdeeds of Shakespeare's beloved, down-on-his-luck knight, who crosses the wrong women in a harebrained scheme to pay off his debts. The stellar cast features four beloved company favorites: baritone **Reginald Smith, Jr.** as Falstaff, soprano **Nicole Heaston** as Alice, baritone **Blake Denson** as Ford, and soprano **Andrea Carroll** as Nannetta. **Paula Suozzi** directs the production, and maestro **Patrick Summers** conducts.

The company will launch its winter repertoire with Wagner's revered masterpiece, *Parsifal*, in a colorful production from Tony Award-winning director **John Caird**. The opera takes audiences on a mystical journey as a group of knights tries to protect the Holy Grail and their wounded king, who can only be healed by the titular protagonist and the Holy Spear. HGO Principal Guest Conductor **Eun Sun Kim** will lead a cast of extraordinary Wagnerians—including tenor **Russell Thomas** as Parsifal, soprano **Christine Goerke** as Kundry, bass **Kwangchul Youn** as Gurnemanz, and bass-baritone **Ryan McKinny** as King Amfortas—for this major operatic event.

Next, Puccini's beloved tragedy, *Madame Butterfly*, returns to HGO, with **Jordan Braun** directing the revival of Tony Award winner **Michael Grandage's** acclaimed production. The opera's diverse cast will be led by internationally sought-after soprano **Ailyn Pérez**, who returns to Houston as Cio-Cio-San, opposite tenor **Yongzhao Yu** as Pinkerton in his role debut, with mezzo-soprano **Sun-Ly Pierce** as Suzuki, bass-baritone **Michael Sumuel** as Sharpless, bass **William Guanbo Su** as the Bonze, and tenor **Rodell Rosel** as Goro. Maestro **Patrick Summers** conducts.

HGO's spring repertoire opens with Mozart's sublime tragicomedy, *Don Giovanni*. Conducted by the world-renowned **Dame Jane Glover**, the production will be led by superstar Italian bass-baritone **Luca Pisaroni** as the opera's titular womanizing antihero opposite sensational soprano **Andriana Chuchman** in her role debut as Donna Anna. They will be joined by a powerhouse cast that includes bass-baritone **Ryan McKinny** as Leporello, tenor **Kang Wang** in his company debut as Don Ottavio, and mezzo-soprano **Sasha Cooke** as Donna Elvira. **Greg Eldridge** directs the revival of **Kasper Holten's** innovative production.

Closing the season is acclaimed director **Francesca Zambello's** vibrant new staging of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music*, co-produced by HGO and the Glimmerglass Festival. The world-class HGO Orchestra and Chorus will propel the timeless tale and its outstanding cast, which includes Grammy-winning mezzo-soprano **Isabel Leonard** as Maria and baritone **Alexander Birch Elliott** as the Captain. HGO's **Richard Bado** takes the podium to conduct this classic family-friendly production.

Dastoor continues, "The caliber of performers and the resources these operas require, their pure scope, their wild ambition—the season will require marshaling our full creative forces in service of epic storytelling. We cannot wait to share these incredible and historic performances with the diverse community we serve."

During the 2023-24 school year, HGO will present composer **Faye Chiao** and librettist **Anton Dudley's** company-commissioned opera *Katie: The Strongest of the Strong*, which made its digital world premiere in 2020. The 45-minute opera celebrates women's strength and confidence through the inspiring true story of protagonist Katie Sandwina, a circus strongwoman who defied expectations and went on to help lead the U.S. suffrage movement in the early 1900s. The opera will tour community spaces and schools throughout the season.

On February 2, 2024, HGO will present the 36th annual *Concert of Arias*, the live final round of the Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers, which brings young singers from around the world to Houston. The company holds this popular event each year to identify candidates for the company's internationally acclaimed emerging artist training program, the Sarah and Ernest Butler Houston Grand Opera Studio.

In 2024 HGO will present the fifth annual *Giving Voice*, its popular celebration of Black artists in opera created by international tenor **Lawrence Brownlee**. Details including presenting partners, date, and location will be announced at a later date.

From February 16 to 18, 2024, the HGO-commissioned chamber opera *The Big Swim*, created by composer **Meilina Tsui** and librettist **Melisa Tien**, will make its world premiere. The new work—which shares the story of the Jade Emperor and the Great Race between the 12 animals that became the symbols of the Lunar New Year calendar—will be presented at the Asia Society Texas Center as part of its Lunar New Year festivities.

This season HGO is offering a variety of subscriptions, from flexible three-opera packages to the full six-opera season. Full subscriptions start as low as \$90. Subscriptions to the 2023-24 season are now available at [HGO.org](https://www.hgo.org). Single tickets will be available later this summer.

Subscribers to the company's 2023-24 season will receive a host of expanded benefits, including a 25 percent discount on additional tickets, first access to all HGO performances, free tickets to the company's popular Butler Studio Showcase, special deals at the HGO Boutique and downtown-area restaurants, entry to win tickets to special HGO events and parties, and a monthly subscriber newsletter.

The company continues to encourage younger audiences to experience the art form through several opportunities, including its popular Opening Nights for Young Professionals (ONYP) subscription series; and tickets starting at \$25 for all productions.

HGO's mainstage season will comprise **34 mainstage, 2 student, and 2 free performances** of six productions. Additional details of the upcoming HGO productions are provided below, and more information is available at the company's website: [HGO.org](https://www.hgo.org). All repertoire, dates, pricing, productions, and casting are subject to change without notice.

**PHOTOS:** Photos that can be used with coverage of the HGO 2023-2024 season announcement news can be found [here](#). All photos are courtesy of Houston Grand Opera.

### **About Houston Grand Opera**

Houston Grand Opera (HGO) is one of the largest, most innovative, and most highly acclaimed opera companies in the United States. General Director and CEO Khori Dastoor assumed leadership of the organization and responsibility for its strategic vision in 2021. HGO was the only American finalist for Opera Company of the Year in the 2019 International Opera Awards, and the only American company to be nominated twice. In fulfilling its mission to advance the operatic art, to serve the Houston community, and to be a global leader in the future of opera, HGO has led the field in commissioning and producing new works (74 world premieres to date) and in training and nurturing promising young artists and administrators. The company contributes to the cultural enrichment of Houston and the nation through a diverse and innovative program of performances, community events, and education projects

that reaches the widest possible public. HGO's pioneering Community and Learning initiative has served as a model for other arts organizations. The company invites all Houstonians to experience superlative opera without the barrier of price through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

HGO has toured extensively and has won a Tony, two Grammy awards, and three Emmy awards. It is the only opera company to win all three honors.

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### Houston Grand Opera: 2023-24 Season

\* Company mainstage debut

# Alternate cast

† Sarah and Ernest Butler Houston Grand Opera Studio artist

‡ Former Butler Studio artist

**Heggie | Scheer: *Intelligence***

**Music by Jake Heggie**

**Libretto by Gene Scheer**

Conceived by Jake Heggie, Gene Scheer, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar

Performance dates: October 20, 22m, 28, November 1, 3, 2023

*Sung in English with projected English text*

#### CAST:

Elizabeth Van Lew	Jamie Barton ‡
Mary Jane Bowser	Janai Brugger *
Lucinda	J'Nai Bridges *
Callie Van Lew	Caitlin Lynch ‡
Henry	Nicholas Newton ‡
Travis Briggs	Michael Mayes
Wilson	Joshua Blue *
Dance Company	Urban Bush Women *

#### CREATIVE TEAM:

Composer	Jake Heggie
Librettist	Gene Scheer
Conductor	Kwamé Ryan *
Director/Choreographer	Jawole Willa Jo Zollar *
Set Designer	Mimi Lien *
Costume Designer	Carlos Soto *
Lighting Designer	John Torres
Projection Designers	Wendall K. Harrington
	Rasean Davonté Johnson *
Associate Choreographer	Vincent Thomas *



Ford  
Mistress Quickly  
Nannetta  
Fenton  
Meg Page  
Doctor Caius  
Bardolf

Blake Denson ‡  
Jennifer Johnson Cano  
Andrea Carroll ‡  
Jack Swanson \*  
Emily Treigle †  
Martin Bakari \*  
Michael McDermott \*

**CREATIVE TEAM:**

Conductor	Patrick Summers <i>Sarah and Ernest Butler Chair</i>
Director	Paula Suozzi
Set and Costume Designer	Adrian Linford
Lighting Designer	Rick Fisher
Chorus Director	Richard Bado ‡ <i>Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Director Chair</i>

HGO Orchestra  
HGO Chorus

*A Production of Los Angeles Opera*

**SPONSOR:**

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**Wagner: *Parsifal***

Performance dates: January 19, 21m, 27, 31, February 4m, 2024

*Sung in German with projected English translation*

**CAST:**

Parsifal	Russell Thomas
Kundry	Christine Goerke
Gurnemanz	Kwangchul Youn *
Amfortas	Ryan McKinny ‡
Klingsor	Andrea Silvestrelli
Titirel	André Courville *
Flower Maidens	Meryl Dominguez † Erin Wagner † Renée Richardson † Ani Kushyan †*
Esquires	Demetrious Sampson Michael McDermott

**CREATIVE TEAM:**

Principal Guest Conductor	Eun Sun Kim
Director	John Caird
Original Scenic and Costume Designer	Johan Engels
Associate Scenic Designer	David Farley
Original Lighting Designer	Duane Schuler
Revival Lighting Designer	Michael James Clark
Choreographer	Tim Claydon
Chorus Director	Richard Bado ‡ <i>Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Director Chair</i>

HGO Orchestra  
HGO Chorus

*A Production of Lyric Opera of Chicago*

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Mr. John G. Turner and Mr. Jerry G. Fischer

**Puccini: *Madame Butterfly***

Performance dates: January 26, 28m, 30 (Student Matinee) #, February 3, 6 (High School Night) #, 7, 9, 11m, 2024

*Sung in Italian with projected English translation*

**CAST:**

Cio-Cio-San	Ailyn Pérez Raquel González *#
Pinkerton	Yongzhao Yu ‡ Eric Taylor ##
Sharpless	Michael Sumuel ‡ Navasard Hakobyan #†
Suzuki	Sun-Ly Pierce ‡ Emily Treigle #†

Goro  
The Bonze  
Yamadori  
Kate Pinkerton

Rodell Rosel  
William Guanbo Su ‡  
André Courville  
Erin Wagner †

**CREATIVE:**

Conductor	Patrick Summers <i>Sarah and Ernest Butler Chair</i>
Original Director	Michael Grandage
Revival Director	Jordan Lee Braun *
Set and Costume Designer	Christopher Oram
Original Lighting Designer	Neil Austin
Revival Lighting Designer	Philip Alfano
Chorus Director	Richard Bado ‡ <i>Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Director Chair</i>

HGO Orchestra  
HGO Chorus

*A Co-Production of Houston Grand Opera, Grand Théâtre de Genève, and Lyric Opera of Chicago*

**SPONSORS:**

**GUARANTORS**

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**GRAND UNDERWRITERS**

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Marianne and Joe Geagea  
Carolyn Levy  
Laura and Brad McWilliams

**Mozart: *Don Giovanni***

Performance dates: April 19, 21m, 27, May 1, 3, 2024  
*Sung in Italian with projected English translation*

**CAST:**

Don Giovanni	Luca Pisaroni
Leporello	Ryan McKinny ‡
Donna Anna	Andriana Chuchman
Don Ottavio	Kang Wang *
Donna Elvira	Sasha Cooke
Zerlina	Erika Baikoff *
Commendatore	Patrick Guetti *

**CREATIVE:**

Conductor	Dame Jane Glover
Original Director	Kasper Holten
Revival Director	Greg Eldridge
Set Designer	Es Devlin
Costume Designer	Anja Vang Kragh
Original Lighting Designer	Bruno Poet
Associate Lighting Designer	John-Paul Percox
Projection Designer	Luke Halls
Original Choreographer	Signe Fabricius
Revival Choreographer	Anna-Marie Sullivan
Chorus Director	Richard Bado ‡ <i>Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Director Chair</i>

HGO Orchestra  
HGO Chorus

*A Co-Production of Houston Grand Opera; Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; Gran Teatre del Liceu; and The Israeli Opera*

**SPONSORS:**

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The Robert and Jane Cizik Foundation

**GRAND UNDERWRITER**

Laura and Brad McWilliams

**Rodgers | Hammerstein II: *The Sound of Music***

**Music by Richard Rodgers**

**Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II**

**Book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse**

Suggested by "The Trapp Family Singers" by Maria Augusta Trapp

Performance dates: April 26, 28m, 30, May 4, 5m, 10, 11, 12m, 2024

*Sung in English with projected English text*

**CAST:**

Maria Rainer	Isabel Leonard
Captain Georg von Trapp	Alexander Birch Elliott
The Mother Abbess	Katie Van Kooten
Liesl	Tori Tedeschi Adams *
Max Detweiler	Daniel Belcher ‡
Elsa Schraeder	Megan Marino *
Sister Margaretta	Renée Richardson †
Sister Berthe	Erin Wagner †

Sister Sophia

Ani Kushyan †

**CREATIVE:**

Conductor

Richard Bado ‡

Director

Francesca Zambello

Associate Director/

Eric Sean Fogel

Choreographer

Set Designer

Peter J. Davison

Costume Designer

Aleš Valášek \*

Lighting Designer

Mark McCullough

Sound Designer

Andrew Harper

HGO Orchestra

HGO Chorus

*A Co-Production of Houston Grand Opera and The Glimmerglass Festival*

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**GRAND UNDERWRITERS**

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