



Elizabeth Baisley, Director of Communications
Media Contact: Claire Vince, Senior Publicist
cvince@houstongrandopera.org
713-546-0278 / 832-738-2611

Houston Grand Opera Announces New Leadership

Patrick Summers Takes Helm as Artistic and Music Director
Perryn Leech Named Managing Director

Houston, TX, May 25, 2011: The Board of Directors of **Houston Grand Opera** (HGO) today voted unanimously to realign its top management structure, naming **Patrick Summers** as Artistic and Music Director, occupying the Margaret Alkek Williams Chair. Chief Operating Officer **Perryn Leech** has been named Managing Director. Chief Advancement Officer **Greg Robertson** completes the executive leadership team, which is supported by an eight-member senior management staff. These moves follow the departure of **Anthony Freud**, the company's General Director, who has been appointed to lead the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

HGO Chairman of the Board Glen Rosenbaum said, "On behalf of the HGO Board of Directors, I am delighted to announce the appointment of Patrick Summers as Artistic and Music Director. Patrick is one of the world's great opera visionaries and conductors. Since he joined HGO in the 1998-99 season, Patrick's knowledge and leadership have immeasurably inspired and elevated the quality of our artistic product. The pairing of Patrick's vision with the superb managerial and technical expertise of Perryn Leech provides HGO the leadership to achieve new heights of excellence in all its undertakings."

"The Board's primary objective was to assemble a world-class leadership team, and we found those individuals within HGO," noted Rosenbaum. "Each is highly respected in the opera world, and together they assure that our company will build on its successes, continuing and expanding its magnificent record of achievements onstage at the Wortham Center and around the world. Mr. Summers, Mr. Leech and Mr. Robertson all possess extensive knowledge and strong entrepreneurial skills – qualities that are essential to managing a complex and innovative enterprise like HGO."

Mr. Summers said, "I am as honored by the Houston Grand Opera board's confidence as I am grateful to have been mentored by two extraordinary leaders during my tenure as the company's Music Director. I thank David Gockley, who brought me to Houston in the late 1990s, for the many years we worked together. Most especially, I wish to acknowledge my colleague Anthony Freud, with whom I have enjoyed the most inspired and rewarding artistic partnership of my life over these past six seasons. I look forward to the success he will undoubtedly have with Chicago's historic company.

"My initial attraction to Houston Grand Opera has greatly deepened during my years here. In this precarious time for the arts in the United States, HGO has managed to constantly re-define what an arts company could look like in a young and growing American city. HGO is an institution reflective of its city: it is entrepreneurial, inspired by bold ideas. It prefers to climb new mountains rather than stroll through the familiar hills. It is not simply a European Opera house dropped into an American city, waiting for adherents; it is a uniquely American institution, a model for the future of many arts organizations in our nation. Our main objective is to produce great opera, and to make this inspiring art form as available and affordable as possible, while breaking down the social clichés that are unfairly attached to the performing arts.

"In addition to producing the finest performances we can during our seasons, I want to rigorously address an area I feel to be vital not just to HGO, but to American culture: arts education. As governments relentlessly cut the arts from schools, the responsibilities for arts education will increasingly move to arts companies and to the artisans who populate them. We have a moral imperative as artists: to be more than simply the guardians of an honestly great tradition, but to also begin to assume the mantle of educators. Tradition, it must be remembered, is only truly honored by innovation."

In his thirteen years with Houston Grand Opera, Mr. Summers has conducted more than forty-five operas across the full range of the repertoire and is responsible for many of the company's important artistic advances, including the formation and development of the Houston Grand Opera Orchestra, regularly praised by visiting critics as a world-class ensemble. In demand as a conductor at many of the world's great opera houses, he is Principal Guest Conductor at San Francisco Opera, a company with which he has had a long and important association; he also appears regularly at the Metropolitan Opera, Bregenz Festival, and Opera Australia, among others. In August 2010, he was named one of "The 25 Most Powerful Names in U.S. Opera" by *Opera News*.

During his 27-year career in production at theaters and opera companies including English National Opera and Welsh National Opera, Mr. Leech helped facilitate and realize the vision of many renowned directors and designers, along the way accumulating a wealth of theatrical experience across many artistic disciplines. At HGO, he has taken on increasing responsibilities culminating in his promotion to Chief Operating Officer in 2010, a role in which he has overseen all aspects of the company's technical, financial, artistic and administrative operations. Mr. Leech said, "I am committed to continuing to build upon the solid foundations established by Anthony Freud and the HGO Board. Patrick and I look forward to working with and leading our HGO colleagues in building an exciting and strong future for the company."

Departing General Director and CEO Anthony Freud said, "HGO is an extraordinary company of exceptionally talented people with a truly remarkable leadership team that commands tremendous respect throughout the opera business. I couldn't be more delighted that Patrick and Perryn are assuming these extremely important new roles. Both are uniquely well-qualified, and I am sure they will have enormous success." He added, "HGO is a company that I will always love and admire. It is wonderful to know that it will be led by this outstanding and visionary new team, who will I am sure take the company from the strong position it presently occupies to new levels of vision, achievement, and acclaim."

David Gockley, who was General Director at Houston Grand Opera until 2005 and is presently General Director of San Francisco Opera, said "I am thrilled that Patrick will take charge of the artistic fortunes of my beloved HGO. His superior knowledge of the art form and the stature he has attained as the company's Music Director and a widely heralded guest conductor have placed him in an ideal position to lead HGO to the next level of accomplishment."

Honorary board member, mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade commented, "Patrick manifests supreme knowledge, ability and judgment and more than anything a noble heart. It has been the gift of a lifetime to know him and work with him, and HGO is so lucky to have him as its leader."

Houston Grand Opera's fifty-sixth season concluded Sunday after a weekend of free performances: Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* played at Miller Outdoor Theatre to capacity crowds, and *Your Name Means The Sea* by Franghiz Alizadeh, the company's forty-third world premiere, played to a packed house at the Cullen Theater. At the Board meeting Wednesday morning, the company reported ticket sales of over \$4 million, more than ninety-three percent of capacity. HGO's comprehensive campaign, launched in 2007, has raised over \$75 million. "At a time when so many U.S. arts organizations are struggling, Houston Grand Opera is succeeding in all areas – and maintaining tremendous momentum," stated Rosenbaum, adding, "The level of artistic excellence has never been higher, and through the Nexus Initiative and HGOco we are doing groundbreaking work in providing relevant and meaningful service to our community. Our future is very bright indeed."

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Founded in 1955, Houston Grand Opera is an internationally-renowned opera company with a reputation for commissioning and producing new works, including 43 world premieres and six American premieres since 1973. HGO contributes to the cultural enrichment of Houston and the nation through a diverse, innovative and balanced program of performances, events, community and education projects that reach 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 on the WFMT Radio Network, and internationally via the European Broadcast Union.