



## HoustonGrandOpera

510 Preston Street  
Houston, Texas 77002-1504  
Tel. 713-546-0200  
Fax. 713-225-2574  
HoustonGrandOpera.org

**Patrick Summers**

Artistic & Music Director  
Margaret Alkek Williams Chair

**Perryn Leech**

Managing Director

## PRESS RELEASE

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

**Christine Cantrell**

christine@elmorepr.com

713-524-0661

# Houston Grand Opera Awarded Grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to Underwrite New Works

*HGO to produce Carlisle Floyd's Prince of Players, Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's*

*It's a Wonderful Life, and new commissions for Song of Houston initiative*

Houston, (July 7, 2014) – **Houston Grand Opera** recently announced plans to produce new American operatic works over three years with funding from **The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**. Houston Grand Opera has been awarded a \$750,000 grant to support the development and production of two new main stage operas—**Carlisle Floyd's *Prince of Players*** and **Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *It's a Wonderful Life***—and three new commissions under **HGOco**, the company's award-winning community collaboration and education initiative. HGO is a global leader in the creation of new work, having commissioned fifty-four world premieres and seven American premieres since 1973.

The Mellon Foundation's Performing Arts program provides grants based on artistic merit and leadership in the field, with the intent of achieving long-term results. The Foundation has long supported HGO's commitment to new operatic works, which advances the company's leadership in contributing to the cultural enrichment of Houston and the nation. This multi-year grant period will encompass HGO work during the 2014–15, 2015–16, and 2016–17 seasons.

“HGO deeply appreciates the Mellon Foundation's ongoing investment in new works at HGO,” said Perryn Leech, managing director of HGO. “The Mellon Foundation's advocacy for ambitious new work and for bringing that work to broader audiences strongly aligns with HGO's core values of artistic excellence and cultural relevance for a diverse, rapidly growing city like Houston.”

### **Carlisle Floyd's *Prince of Players* (2015–16)**

*Prince of Players* is the latest opera by Carlisle Floyd, one of America's most celebrated living composers and the co-founder of HGO's training program for young artists, the HGO Studio. The opera, for which Floyd also wrote the libretto, tells the story of Edward Kynaston, the last of the “boy players” who performed women's roles onstage in Restoration England, following his life from the height of fame to his

downfall after King Charles II's proclamation allowing women to appear onstage. HGO will present the world premiere of *Prince of Players* in the Wortham Theater Center's Cullen Theater in March 2016.

HGO has previously premiered Floyd's *Bilby's Doll*, *Willie Stark*, *The Passion of Jonathan Wade* (new version), and *Cold Sassy Tree*.

### **Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *It's a Wonderful Life* (2016–17)**

HGO's new series of holiday opera commissions, to be launched in December 2014 with *A Christmas Carol*, continues in 2016 with a new work by composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer, whose previous collaborations include *Moby-Dick* and *Three Decembers*.

Based on Philip Van Doren Stern's story "The Greatest Gift" and made famous by the classic 1946 Frank Capra movie, HGO's adaptation of *It's a Wonderful Life* will follow the well-loved journey of George Bailey, a troubled banker about to end his own life on Christmas Eve, only to be saved when his guardian angel helps him realize how many lives he has touched. *It's a Wonderful Life* will have its world premiere in December 2016 in the Wortham Theater Center's Cullen Theater.

### **HGOco opens new phase of *Song of Houston* with historic commission *O Columbia* (2015–16)**

The Mellon grant will fund three commissions marking the next chapter of HGOco's innovative *Song of Houston* initiative, the ongoing project that tells the stories of Houstonians through words and music. The first commission, *O Columbia*, is a chamber opera to be composed by **Gregory Spears** with a libretto by **Royce Vavrek**, premiering in the fall of 2015. The other two commissions will be announced at a later date. Each of these works will be performed in large public venues as well as at the Wortham Theater Center's Cullen Theater.

*O Columbia* will commemorate the tragic events surrounding the *Columbia* space shuttle in 2003. The opera will explore the *Columbia*'s tragic fate from multiple perspectives including the control room at Houston's Johnson Space Center, a family waiting at Cape Canaveral in Florida, the astronaut crew on board the *Columbia*, and residents north of Houston who witnessed the fatal scene in the sky. Composer Gregory Spears previously wrote the score for HGOco's *The Bricklayer* in 2012. Librettist Royce Vavrek recently collaborated with composer Ricky Ian Gordon on the opera *27*, which premiered at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis in June.

The award-winning *Song of Houston* is an ongoing initiative within HGOco that creates new works based on stories that define the unique character of Houston. Notable *Song of Houston* projects include 2007's *The Refuge*, a groundbreaking musical tapestry of immigrant stories from various Houston communities; 2010's *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna / To Cross the Face of the Moon*, the world's first mariachi opera; and East + West (2010-14), a four-year series of eight chamber operas telling contemporary stories from Houston's Asian communities. In 2009 the program received the Leading Lights Diversity Award in Arts and Culture from the National MultiCultural Institute (NCMI).

Now in its eighth year, HGOco has commissioned sixteen new works and conducted innovative community projects reaching more than one million people in the greater Houston metropolitan area. HGOco creates opportunities for Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to observe, participate in, and create art. Through

projects like *O Columbia*, HGOco endeavors to make opera relevant to its changing audiences by connecting the company with the diverse Houston community through collaboration.

Since the early 2000s, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has helped HGO fulfill its commitment to creating new and innovative opera. Significant grant funding has supported fifteen new commissions and rarely performed works on HGO's main stage, and many of HGOco's community-based commissions, including the 2010 *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*, the world's first mariachi opera, and the East + West series.

More information about Houston Grand Opera and HGOco is available at the company's website, [HGO.org](http://HGO.org).

### Media Contacts

Houston Grand Opera: Christine Cantrell, [christine@elmorepr.com](mailto:christine@elmorepr.com), (713) 524-0661

[facebook.com/houstongrandopera](https://facebook.com/houstongrandopera)

[twitter.com/hougrandopera](https://twitter.com/hougrandopera)



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-four world premieres and seven 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.

Through its HGOco initiative, 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 program to create and share work based on stories that define the unique character of the city and its diverse communities. Since 2007, HGOco has commissioned sixteen new works along with countless innovative community projects, reaching more than one million people in the greater Houston metropolitan area. The NEXUS Initiative is HGO's multi-year ticket underwriting program that allows Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to enjoy world-class opera without the barrier of price. Since 2007 NEXUS has enabled more than 170,000 Houstonians to experience first-quality opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.