It’s a Wonderful Life opera audio recording now available in digital formats and for CD pre-orders

Houston Grand Opera world premiere by Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer joins PENTATONE’s American Opera Series

Houston, August 14, 2017—It’s Christmas in August. Houston Grand Opera’s (HGO) world premiere of composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer’s opera It’s a Wonderful Life is now available for audio streaming, high resolution download, and CD pre-orders on the PENTATONE website. The CD will be released worldwide on September 1. It’s a Wonderful Life is the newest addition to PENTATONE’s American Opera Series.

The 1946 Frank Capra film It’s a Wonderful Life has become synonymous with the American holiday spirit, and composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer knew before they ever wrote a note or a line that there are challenges in adapting a treasured classic for the operatic stage. After all, Heggie and Scheer’s hit 2010 opera Moby-Dick raised the same challenges: how could they remain faithful to the source material and still create something new that emphasized the story’s innate operatic qualities? For It’s a Wonderful Life, Heggie and Scheer responded by keeping the basic plot and characters from the beloved film version but changing the perspective. As in the film, an angel—changed in the opera from Clarence to Clara—is assigned to help a man named George Bailey, who is despondent and contemplating taking his own life on Christmas Eve; if Clara succeeds, she will earn her wings. But in a departure from the film, all the action takes place from Clara’s perspective and in her realm. Mirrored doors represent portals in time and space, which Clara uses to piece together the events of George’s life in an effort to understand what has brought him to this moment of despair. How well did Heggie and Scheer succeed? Critics said the “feel good” work (Opera Warhorses) “dispels any notion that you may
have about expecting the opera to duplicate the film [and has a] crazy-quilt score that may be Heggie’s most delightful concoction” (Theater Jones). As the Houston Chronicle critic summed up, “George Bailey would be proud.”

“What a great joy, privilege, and immense challenge it was to take the beloved story of It’s a Wonderful Life and compose the music for the people of Bedford Falls. The emotional journey of George Bailey and Clara allowed me to call on musical styles of the 1920s, ’30s and ’40s, contrasted with music from the heavens. The project of a lifetime.” Jake Heggie

“From the moment I began work on the libretto, I believed that George Bailey’s journey from despair to redemption was something that music could thrillingly illuminate. I also believed, with all my heart, that this story’s message of the value of every life was essential for our own time. Working on this project has been a profound privilege.” Gene Scheer

Houston Grand Opera commissioned It's a Wonderful Life with a leadership gift from Sara and Bill Morgan as part of its holiday opera series and premiered the work in December 2016. The cast, who are also featured on the recording, included tenor William Burden as George Bailey, with soprano Talise Trevigne making her HGO debut as Clara. HGO Studio alumna Andrea Carroll sang Mary Hatch Bailey and HGO Studio alumnus Joshua Hopkins took the role of Harry Bailey. Mr. Potter/Mr. Gower was sung by American tenor Rod Gilfry, in his HGO debut. Leonard Foglia directed the production, which was conducted by HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers. It’s a Wonderful Life was the sixth Heggie premiere conducted by Maestro Summers and the third Heggie/Scheer commission by HGO.

The opera, which was co-produced with Indiana University’s Jacobs School of Music and San Francisco Opera, will be performed at Indiana University in the fall of 2017 and at San Francisco Opera in the fall of 2018.

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. HGO was the only American finalist for Opera Company of the Year at the 2017 International Opera Awards. In fulfilling its mission to advance the operatic art to serve an ever-evolving audience, HGO has led the field in commissioning new works (63 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 engagement initiative, HGOco, has served as a model for other arts organizations.

The NEXUS Initiative is HGO’s multi-year ticket underwriting program that allows Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to enjoy opera without the barrier of price. Since 2007, NEXUS has enabled more than 250,000 Houstonians to experience superlative opera 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 two Emmy awards. It is the only opera company to win all three honors.
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