

O'Regan & Caird

The Phoenix

HOUSTON GRAND OPERA
PATRICK SUMMERS



HoustonGrandOpera

HOUSTON GRAND OPERA PRESENTS

WORLD PREMIERE

THE PHOENIX

or The Operatic Adventures of Lorenzo Da Ponte on Two Continents in Two Acts

Music by Tarik O'Regan | Libretto by John Caird



Photo by Lynn Lane

CAST (in order of vocal appearance)

Lorenzo Da Ponte Thomas Hampson

Enzo
Young Da Ponte Luca PisaroniPatrick Kelly Chad Shelton
Bishop of Ceneda
Giacomo Casanova
Emperor Joseph II
"Opera" Taylor
Clement Clarke MooreMaria Malibran Rihab Chaieb
Wolfgang Mozart
Nancy Da PonteGiulietta Lauren Snouffer
AnzolettaMary Grahl
Brigida BantiFaustina Elizabeth Sutphen
Angela Tiepolo
Annetta
Matilda Grahl
Anna MorichelliEmanuele Gabriel Magallón
Conegliano

Baruch Conegliano Stephen Hill

Anania Conegliano Ethan Gonzalez

CREATIVE TEAMConductor Patrick Summers
Margaret Alkek Williams Chair

Director John Caird

Set and David Farley
Costume Designer

Lighting Designer Michael James Clark

Choreographer / Tim Claydon
Movement DirectorChorus Master Richard Bado
*Sarah and Ernest Butler
Chorus Master Chair*Children's Chorus Karen Reeves
DirectorContinuo Patrick Summers, Fortepiano
Margaret Alkek Williams Chair

Barrett Sills, Cello

Italian Coach Nicolò Sbuelz

Musical Preparation Geoffrey Loff

Peter Pasztor
*Sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. James A.
Elkins Jr. Endowment Fund*Blair Salter
*Dr. Saúl and Ursula Balagura/
Audrey Jones Beck Endowed Fund Fellow*

Stage Manager Annie Wheeler

Assistant Director Katrina Bachus

Supertitles by Jeremy Johnson

CREATIVE CREDITS

Latin text by Alastair Harding

Italian text by Jonathan Brandani and
Gabriele ColferaiOrchestration by Tarik O'Regan,
assisted by Anthony Weeden

Jeremy Johnson, Dramaturg

Ann Owens, Commissioning Consultant

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Performing artists, stage directors, and choreographers are represented by the American Guild of Musical Artists, the union for opera professionals in the United States.

Scenic, costume, and lighting designers and assistant designers are represented by United Scenic Artists, IATSE, Local USA-829.

Orchestral musicians are represented by the Houston Professional Musicians Association, Local #65-699, American Federation of Musicians.

Stage crew personnel provided by IATSE, Local #51.

Wardrobe personnel provided by Theatrical Wardrobe Union, Local #896.

RECORDING PRODUCTION CREDITS**SOUNDMIRROR**

Producer Blanton Alspaugh

Recording Mark Donahue
Engineer

Wireless Engineer Brandon Johnson

Mixing and Mark Donahue
Mastering Engineer**HGO**

Producer Daniel James

TRACK LISTING

ACT I	
1. Ouvertura Length 03:23:59	21. Aria: I feed my composers exquisite language Length 01:31:28
2. Recitativo a parte: E tu questa, la chiami un' ouverture? Length 03:51:57	22. Recitativo secco e a parte: Da Ponte, mio caro Length 01:05:53
3. Aria narrativa: Signore e signori Length 02:04:21	21. Aria: I feed my composers exquisite language Length 01:31:28
4. Coro con recitativo a parte: Omnipotens sempiternus Deus Length 05:14:72	22. Recitativo secco e a parte: Da Ponte, mio caro Length 01:05:53
5. Recitativo a parte: Bravi! Bravi! Length 01:13:37	23. Duetto: Give me your hand, dear Abbe Length 01:46:39
6. Aria narrativa: Amici dell' Arte! Length 00:41:07	24. Recitativo secco: Beaumarchais? Length 00:29:54
7. Coro: Everybody's in disguise Length 00:41:33	25. Duetto: We're slaves in service Length 02:05:60
8. Recitativo secco e a parte: Angela, carissima! Length 01:19:31	26. Recitativo secco: Bravo! Length 00:43:69
9. Coro: Everybody's so devout Length 00:47:39	27. Trio con recitativo a parte: How am I doing? Length 03:52:35
10. Duetto: I dreamed of a life of the mind Length 03:53:62	28. Aria: My dearest friends Length 03:04:73
11. Recitativo secco: Casanova, the very man! Length 01:23:13	29. Recitativo secco: What's this? Length 01:47:51
12. Aria con recitativo a parte: We live as we can Length 01:59:51	30. Duetto: Happy the men who can think what they want Length 01:47:01
13. Coro: Everyone's conspiring Length 00:46:32	31. Trenodia e sestetto con coro e recitativo a parte: Man, that is born of a woman Length 05:26:62
14. Recitativo secco: Serenissima? Not for much longer Length 00:21:08	32. Recitativo a parte: Mutazione! (London) Length 03:04:02
15. Quartetto con recitativo a parte: This year, in Philadelphia Length 03:10:44	32. Recitativo a parte: Mutazione! (London) Length 03:04:02
16. Coro inquisizione: Te, Laurentio Da Ponte Length 01:10:51	33. Aria narrativa: Signore e signori, the story moves on Length 01:02:31
17. Recitativo a parte: Mutazione! (Venice) Length 01:15:64	34. Passacaglia: Time flows by Length 07:20:08
18. Aria: The Phoenix burns to be reborn Length 01:12:56	35. Recitativo secco: What is it, my love? Length 00:52:09
19. Fuga imperiale: Here, at the heart of the Holy Roman Empire Length 01:58:24	36. Aria: Twelve years have passed Length 03:04:25
20. Recitativo secco: Is it true, what they say? Length 01:09:30	37. Finale (duetto con recitativo a parte e coro): I'm fifty-five and I am old Length 03:34:37
20.5 Aria interrotta: Di gemme e di stelle Length 00:27:11	

TRACK LISTING

ACT II	
38. Introduzione Length 01:33:27	52. Duetto: Amade Length 03:14:35
39. Today, in Philadelphia Length 02:56:25	53. Recitativo accompagnato: Devo andar via di qui! Length 01:19:33
40. Aria: Morning Length 02:19:30	54. Duetto: You fed me Dante Length 03:02:60
41. Recitativo accompagnato: How did we do today? Length 01:15:37	55. Trio con bambini accompagnato e a parte: Susquehanna (reprise) Length 04:00:12
42. Recitativo accompagnato e a parte: That's just how it was Length 00:36:50	56. Recitativo accompagnato: La Vita di Benvenuto Cellini Length 01:46:10
43. Duetto: Che mai faremo? Length 02:37:73	57. Aria ricordato: The Phoenix burns to be reborn Length 01:10:50
44. Recitativo a parte: Li fai sembrare così felici insieme Length 00:34:52	58. Recitativo accompagnato: But, darling, the money Length 02:17:47
45. Recitativo accompagnato: Signor Riley! Length 00:23:16	59. Coro di cittadinanza: I declare, so help me God Length 03:10:44
46. Duetto: Pardon me, Sir Length 01:50:62	60. Duetto: And then we held the Stars and Stripes Length 04:40:34
47. Recitativo accompagnato e a parte: I speak only of the best! Length 01:19:25	61. Coro e recitativo accompagnato: Man, that is born of a woman Length 03:37:22
48. Coro accademico: Quale cappello e nero? Length 01:58:15	62. Finale (aria e sestetto con coro): Addio fedeli amici Length 04:49:60
49. Recitativo a parte: Non duro molto Length 00:48:51	63. Aria: Amici, amici Length 01:56:25
50. Aria con bambini: Susquehanna Length 04:03:52	64. Recitativo a parte: Ma com' e andata? Length 05:03:59
51. Recitativo accompagnato: Enzo! Length 01:43:51	

QUICK START GUIDE

The Phoenix

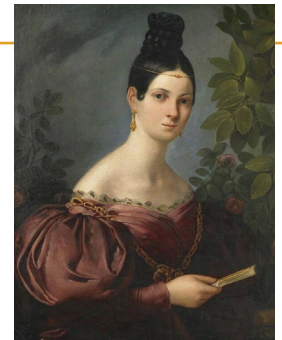
STORY IN A NUTSHELL

It is 1832 at the Park Theatre in Manhattan. Lorenzo Da Ponte has written the libretto for a new opera titled *The Phoenix*, based on his life; he hopes proceeds from the performances will help him to build a new theater for Italian opera in New York. The final dress rehearsal is about to begin. Da Ponte and his son Lorenzo Jr., nicknamed Enzo, who composed the music, are co-directing and performing as well. The other performers include opera stars Maria Malibran and Patrick Kelly and two of Da Ponte's nieces, Giulietta and Faustina. The elder Da Ponte plays himself throughout; Enzo plays himself as well as his father as a young man. The other principal characters portray themselves in the backstage scenes and scene changes but take multiple roles in the opera-within-an-opera, *The Phoenix*. The opera traces the circuitous route of Lorenzo Da Ponte's life from boyhood in Ceneda, Italy, to America, where he lived for more than 30 years.

A full synopsis begins on p. 52.

How Much of *The Phoenix* Is Factual?

Aside from the fact that Lorenzo Da Ponte never wrote an opera about his life (although he did write highly fanciful memoirs!), and that his namesake son was never a composer nor a librettist, the major plot points and characters portrayed in the opera-within-an-opera are based on real people and occurrences. Of the cast of singers who perform the opera, all of them have some basis in fact. Maria Malibran was one of the most famous singers of her day; Patrick Kelly is based on the Irish tenor Michael Kelly (with his first name changed to Patrick in honor of HGO's Patrick Summers); Giulietta is based on a niece of Da Ponte; and Faustina is based on a half-sister of Da Ponte.



Portrait of Maria Malibran, circa 1834.

MORE FACTS

1 Italian opera was first heard in New York in late 1825, when an important operatic family from Europe, headed by Manuel Garcia, came to perform at the Park Theatre in New York. When they arrived, Da Ponte introduced himself, and Garcia was thrilled to meet the author of *Don Giovanni*. During the nine months the company performed in New York, Garcia's young daughter made the strongest impression. She would later become one of the greatest stars of her time under her married name—Maria Malibran.

2 *The Phoenix* librettist John Caird says that Da Ponte actually did invite his niece (Giulietta in the opera; Giulia in real life) to come to America to perform, but she was “out of her depth” and her performance was a failure. She married an Italian man she met in America and returned to Europe without even telling Da Ponte good-bye. She never forgave him, according to Caird.

3 The war that Emperor Joseph II refers to in *The Phoenix* was the Habsburg-Ottoman War, 1788–91. The conflict wreaked havoc on the Austrian economy and also on Joseph's health. His death in 1790 was related to an illness he contracted at the front.

4 The buggy used in Act II was obtained through Glenn Moreland's Wagon Shop of Ft. Davis, Texas. Moreland has built wagons for museums, restaurants, and even Disneyland. The wagon seen in *The Phoenix* dates to the late 1800s, several decades after the time depicted in the opera, but Moreland says that buggy styles changed very little over that period. It's entirely possible Da Ponte owned a buggy much like it.



SYNOPSIS

ACT I

1832: PARK THEATRE, MANHATTAN OVERTURE

A new opera about the life of Lorenzo Da Ponte, entitled *The Phoenix*, is being given its final dress rehearsal before a handpicked audience of well-heeled New Yorkers.

The 83-year-old Da Ponte has written the libretto; his son, Enzo, has composed the music. In Act I, Enzo is to play the part of his father as a young man. In Act II, Enzo and Da Ponte will each play themselves. The other members of the cast are the seasoned opera singers Maria Malibran and Patrick Kelly, as well as two of Da Ponte's nieces, Giulietta and Faustina, recently arrived from Italy. All four will play multiple roles in *The Phoenix*.

PROLOGUE

Final preparations for the rehearsal are underway. Throughout the evening, we eavesdrop on the cast, in the wings and dressing rooms, sharing their nervousness for the success of Da Ponte's opera. They also comment on the veracity or appropriateness of the action depicted.

Just before curtain-up, Da Ponte addresses the audience. He tells them *The Phoenix* is based on his own memoirs. Proceeds from the performances will help him build the first-ever Italian opera house in New York City.

The rehearsal begins.

1762: CENEDA CATHEDRAL

Shortly after the death of his mother, the 14-year-old Da Ponte (born Emanuele Conegliano) is ordered to appear at the cathedral of Ceneda. Together with the rest of his Jewish family, he is converted to Christianity in order that his father can be married again, this time to a Catholic woman. Emanuele is given the Bishop's own name, Lorenzo Da Ponte, as well as a gift: a copy of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Commenting from the wings, the present-day Da Ponte remembers the occasion with emotional perplexity. This difficult and confusing event marks the beginning of a life of conflicted identity.

1770-80: VENICE

Da Ponte is now an ordained Catholic priest, living in Venice. He is secretly involved with an aristocratic woman, Angela Tiepolo. He recognizes his duplicity but feels powerless to control himself. He soon

moves on to a younger mistress, Anzoletta Bellaudi, with whom he has a baby. Da Ponte confesses to his friend and mentor, Giacomo Casanova, that he is racked with guilt, unable to continue living a double life. Casanova advises him to take art more seriously than life and suggests Da Ponte's child should be sent to the Pietà, a local orphanage. Da Ponte convinces himself that he has no choice but to follow his friend's advice.

In the fall of 1776, Da Ponte, Casanova, and Anzoletta are in a café discussing the United States Declaration of Independence. Da Ponte is thrilled with the notion that this revolutionary spirit could spread to Europe, leading to freedom from the oppressive powers of State and Church. He openly espouses these seditious opinions.

Reported to the Senate and Inquisition for political dissidence and immorality, Da Ponte is banished from Venice for 15 years.

1781-92: VIENNA AND TRIESTE

Da Ponte has been appointed poet and librettist to the court of the Austrian emperor, Joseph II. After a bad start with some second-rate composers, Joseph introduces Da Ponte to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who suggests they create an opera based on Beaumarchais's scandalous play *Le mariage de Figaro*. The opera is a triumph at its premiere in 1786. Encouraged by this, Da Ponte sets to work on a number of new operas, including *Don Giovanni* with Mozart.

By the time of the first Viennese performance of *Giovanni* in 1788, Austria is at war. Emperor Joseph, sick and aging, is facing a serious threat to his rule. Shortly after the premiere of *The School for Lovers* (*Così fan tutte*) in 1790, Joseph dies and the opera company closes down. Da Ponte's artistic enemies force him out of Vienna.

Now living in Trieste, Italy, Da Ponte is devastated to learn of the death of Mozart. A few months later he marries Nancy Grahl, an Englishwoman. Because he is still officially a priest, they cannot be married in a church. They choose instead to hold the service in a synagogue in acknowledgment of their shared Jewish heritage.

1793-1805: LONDON

Da Ponte and Nancy move to London where they start a family. Da Ponte takes up the role of poet to the King's Italian Opera, but struggles to make a living. Beset by opera politics, the demands of a

growing family, and a mounting pile of debt, Da Ponte becomes more and more unhappy. When his debts threaten to imprison the whole family, Nancy tells him she must escape with their children to her parents, now in the United States.

Six months later in London, Da Ponte is miserable. He tears up all his unpaid bills, and secretly boards a ship for Philadelphia along with other hopeful emigrants.

At this point in the story, the 83-year-old Da Ponte and his son Enzo, trade places in the performance, each to play himself in Act II of their opera, *The Phoenix*.

ACT II

1805: QUAYSIDE, PHILADELPHIA ENTR'ACTE

Da Ponte arrives in the United States after a voyage of two months. He recalls the poem he wrote on learning of the American Revolution in 1776. Along with his fellow immigrants, he relishes the prospect of living in a country free from the constraints of monarchy.

1806: DA PONTE'S GROCERY STORE, ELIZABETHTOWN, NEW JERSEY

In spite of all his artistic ambitions, Da Ponte has become a grocer. This is a business for which he has no talent; he can't resist allowing his customers unlimited credit. Faced with further financial ruin, Nancy and Da Ponte decide to leave Elizabethtown for Manhattan, where they plan to open a finishing school.

1807: RILEY'S BOOKSTORE, MANHATTAN

While browsing in Riley's Bookstore, Da Ponte takes the owner to task for the paucity of great Italian literature in the store. A stranger interrupts them. This is Clement Clarke Moore, a wealthy philanthropist, who high-handedly declares there are few post-Renaissance Italian writers of merit. Da Ponte begs to differ and argues his case for Italian literature so persuasively that Moore decides to invest in the Da Pontes' new school.

1808-10: THE DA PONTE ACADEMY, MANHATTAN

Da Ponte teaches Italian to young gentlemen, while Nancy (assuming the name of Madame Dupont) teaches French to young ladies. She inspires them to

think ambitiously about their role in the world. All seems to be going well, but from the side of the stage, Enzo and his cousins, Faustina and Giulietta, reveal that the school had to close down. The Da Pontes scandalized their students' parents by having them perform in plays, a taboo pursuit in the polite society of that era.

The Da Pontes' next venture is a gin distillery; it also goes broke.

1811-18: SUSQUEHANNA, PENNSYLVANIA

The family moves to the little town of Sunbury in the Susquehanna Valley, an idyllic retreat from city life. Here the children can grow up in peace and safety, though Da Ponte still yearns for his old life in Europe.

He opens a general store. One day, stranded on a country road with his now grown-up son Enzo, he unpacks some recent merchandise from England. On a page of newspaper wrapping, they discover a favorable review of a recent *Don Giovanni* performance. Da Ponte's name is not mentioned. This causes him to reflect ruefully on the posthumous fame of his friend Mozart and his own relative obscurity. At the same time, Enzo muses on his own insignificance. He expresses his desire to be a great poet and composer, like his father, like Mozart. Da Ponte resolves to return to New York in order to resume his artistic and intellectual life.

1819-30: MANHATTAN

As time passes, Nancy looks back on their move to Manhattan, grieving for the loss of her Eden in Susquehanna. She mourns the death of two of her children, Joseph and Louisa, as well as her grandson Franklin, all victims of disease-ridden New York. News of these deaths reaches Da Ponte's nieces, Faustina and Giulietta, back in Ceneda, Italy. They mourn with Nancy.

1831: DA PONTE'S BOOKSTORE, MANHATTAN

The aging Da Ponte is now running his own bookstore. He and Nancy, who is increasingly frail, receive a visit from Clement Clarke Moore. Moore brings news that Da Ponte has been appointed professor of Italian language and literature at Columbia College. This sparks a new dream in Da Ponte: to build the first-ever Italian opera house in

SYNOPSIS CONTINUED

Manhattan. It will be funded by performances of a new opera written by himself and Enzo.

1831: THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE, MANHATTAN

Thinking it beneficial for his fundraising drive, and increasingly committed to life in his adopted country, Da Ponte takes up American citizenship in a naturalization ceremony.

1831: THE DA PONTE HOME

Da Ponte describes the citizenship ceremony to Nancy, who is now gravely ill. They pledge their undying love. Nancy dies.

1832: DA PONTE'S BOOKSTORE AND PARK THEATRE, MANHATTAN

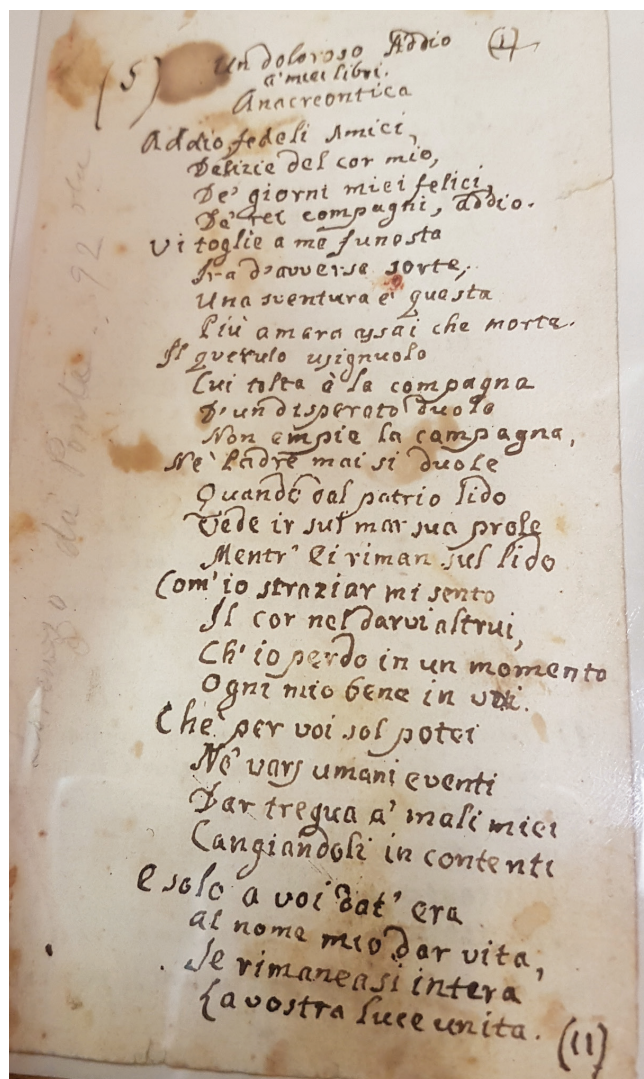
Enzo, grieving for his mother's death, is working on a scene for the new opera, *The Phoenix*. Da Ponte, bitter at the extent of his losses, inveighs against an uncaring God. He is now more intent than ever on one last artistic triumph.

Enzo asks how the premiere will be funded. Da Ponte reveals that Columbia has offered him a handsome sum for his valuable library of ancient Italian and Latin books. All alone in the bookstore, Da Ponte laments the loss of his precious library, using the words of his last great poem, "Un doloroso addio a' miei libri" (A sad farewell to my books). The protagonists of his story join him in an anthem to the restorative power of the creative arts. The opera draws to a close.

Da Ponte addresses the audience one last time, requesting they save their applause for the opening night, and that they help him build an opera house worthy of their great city, New York.

Backstage after the rehearsal, Da Ponte gives Enzo a present. It is his most prized book, the edition of Virgil's *Aeneid* that the Bishop of Ceneda gave him, 70 years before. Da Ponte bids good night to the cast and crew with the expectation of a triumphant performance on the following night.

The other singers all depart. Maria Malibran is now alone with Enzo. She declares him to be the true Phoenix; that he will rise one day from his father's ashes. The two leave the theater arm-in-arm, and go out into the Manhattan night.



A portion of the poem "Un doloroso addio a' miei libri" (A sad farewell to my books) in Da Ponte's handwriting. The poem is in the Columbia University archives.

HOUSTON GRAND OPERA ORCHESTRA

Patrick Summers, Artistic and Music Director
Margaret Alkek Williams Chair

VIOLIN

Denise Tarrant,
Concertmaster *
*Sarah and Ernest Butler
Concertmaster Chair*
Rasa Kalesnykaite, Acting
Assistant Concertmaster *
Natalie Gaynor,
Principal Second Violin *
Carrie Kauk,
Assistant Principal
Second Violin *
Hae-a Lee-Barnes *
Miriam Belyatsky *
Anabel Detrick *
Chavdar Parashkevov *
Mary Reed *
Erica Robinson *
Linda Sanders *
Oleg Sulyga *
Sylvia VerMeulen *
Melissa Williams *
Kana Kimura

VIOLA

Eliseo Rene Salazar,
Principal *
Lorento Golofeev,
Assistant Principal *
Erika C. Lawson *
Suzanne LeFevre *
Gayle Garcia-Shepard *
Dawson White *

CELLO

Barrett Sills, Principal *

Erika Johnson,
Assistant Principal *
Wendy Smith-Butler *
Ariana Nelson *
Steven Wiggs *

DOUBLE BASS

Dennis Whittaker, Principal *
Erik Gronfor,
Assistant Principal *
Carla Clark *

FLUTE

Susan Kang, Acting Principal
Henry Williford

OBOE

Elizabeth Priestly Siffert,
Principal *
Claire Kostic

CLARINET

Sean Krissman, Principal *
Eric Chi *

BASSOON

Amanda Swain, Principal *
Michael Allard *

FRENCH HORN

Sarah Cranston, Principal *
Kimberly Penrod Minson *
Spencer Park *

TRUMPET

Charles Geyer, Acting
Principal
Randal Adams *

TROMBONE

Thomas Hultén, Principal *
Mark Holley *
Ben Osborne

TUBA

Mark Barton, Principal *

HARP

Joan Eidman, Principal *
Laurie Meister

TIMPANI

Nancy Nelson, Principal *

PERCUSSION

Richard Brown, Principal *
Christina Carroll
Craig Hauschildt
Karen Slotter

PIANO/CELESTA

Wesley Ducote

ORCHESTRA PERSONNEL MANAGER

Richard Brown *

* HGO Orchestra core musician

HOUSTON GRAND OPERA CHORUS

Richard Bado, Chorus Master
Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus Master Chair

Geordie Alexander
Dennis Arrowsmith
Stephen Ash
Megan Berti
G. Leslie Biffle
Christopher Childress
Patrick Contreras
Callie Jo Denbigh
Justin Dunkle
Ashly Evans
Frankie Hickman
Julie Hoeltzel

Jon Janacek
Joe Key
Kirsten Lutz Koerner
Wesley Landry
Katie Loff
Alejandro Magallón
Keenan Manceaux
Kathleen Manley
Heath Martin
Katherine McDaniel
Jason Milam
Cristino Perez

Ardeen Pierre
Nicholas Rathgeb
Gabrielle Reed
Kendall Reimer
Hannah Roberts
Christina Scanlan
Valerie Serice
Kade I. Smith
Kaitlyn Stavinoha
Elizabeth Vickers
John Weinel
Jennifer Wright

HOUSTON GRAND OPERA CHILDREN'S CHORUS

Karen Reeves, Director

Alina Garcia
Ethan Gonzalez
Stephen Hill
Gabriel Magallón
Sruthi Panja

SUPERNUMERARIES

Conner Borne
Domonique Champion
Jeffrey Dorman
Brian Mitchell
Gabriel Regojo
Aaron Ruiz

WHO'S WHO


TARIK O'REGAN
**(UNITED KINGDOM/
UNITED STATES)**
Composer

Tarik O'Regan, born in London, is making his HGO debut. He has written music for a wide variety

of ensembles and organizations, including the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Australian Chamber Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, Sydney Dance Company, Chamber Choir Ireland, BBC Proms at the Royal Albert Hall, and the Royal Opera, Covent Garden. Two of his large-scale concert works were revived this April: *Solitude Trilogy* and *Mass Observation*, by the Vancouver Chamber Choir and Houston Chamber Choir, respectively. This season also marks the second year of a three-year appointment as composer in residence with the Pacific Chorale. Recorded on over 30 albums, O'Regan's work has been recognized with two Grammy nominations (including Best Classical Album), and both the *New York Times* and *Philadelphia Inquirer* named *Threshold of Night* among Best Classical Releases of the Year. Other honors include the NEA Artistic Excellence Award and a South Bank Sky Arts Award nomination for *Heart of Darkness*; a Gramophone Award nomination for *Scattered Rhymes*; two British Composer Awards; and recognition from Time Out London (Top Five Concerts of the Year), WQXR/Q2 (CD of the Week), and WNYC (Pick of the Week).


JOHN CAIRD
(UNITED KINGDOM)
Librettist/Director

John Caird's work was most recently seen at HGO in *La bohème* earlier this season (also in 2012); *Tosca* (2015, 2010); *Don Carlos* (2012); and the

2009 world premiere of *Brief Encounter*, for which he also wrote the libretto. He is an honorary associate director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, principal guest director of the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm, and a freelance writer and director of plays, musicals, and operas. His National Theatre productions include *Hamlet*, *Money*, *Humbleboy*, *The Seagull*, *Stanley*, *Trelawney of the Wells*, *Peter Pan*, and his own new Olivier Award-winning version of Bernstein's *Candide*, which is now playing worldwide. Recent directorial credits include *Knight's Tale*, *Hamlet*, and *Twelfth Night* in Tokyo; *Don Giovanni* at Welsh National Opera; *McQueen* at the Haymarket Theatre; *Tosca* in Chicago and Los Angeles; *Love's Labour's Lost* at the Stratford

Festival in Canada; *La bohème* in San Francisco and Toronto; *Parsifal* in Chicago; and his own musical *Daddy Long Legs* Off-Broadway, in Tokyo, and across the United States. He has directed over 20 productions for the Royal Shakespeare Company, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Beggar's Opera*, *Twelfth Night*, *Peter Pan*, *Our Friends in the North*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *Les Misérables*—the last two productions winning numerous awards in the West End, Broadway, and internationally.


PATRICK SUMMERS
(UNITED STATES)
Margaret Alkek Williams Chair
Conductor

Patrick Summers was named artistic and music director of HGO in 2011 after having served as the company's

music director since 1998. Some highlights of his work at HGO include conducting the company's first-ever complete cycle of Wagner's *Ring* and its first performances of the Verdi Requiem; collaborating on the world premieres of André Previn's *Brief Encounter*, Christopher Theofanidis's *The Refuge*, Jake Heggie's *It's a Wonderful Life*, *The End of the Affair*, and *Three Decembers*, Carlisle Floyd's *Cold Sassy Tree* and *Prince of Players*, and Tod Machover's *Resurrection*; leading the American premiere of Weinberg's *The Passenger*, both at HGO and on tour to the Lincoln Center Festival; and nurturing the careers of such artists as Christine Goerke, Ailyn Pérez, Joyce DiDonato, Ana María Martínez, Ryan McKinny, Tamara Wilson, Albina Shagimuratova, Anthony Roth Costanzo, Norman Reinhardt, Jamie Barton, and Dimitri Pittas. Maestro Summers has enjoyed a long association with San Francisco Opera (SFO) and was honored in 2015 with the San Francisco Opera Medal. His work with SFO includes conducting Jake Heggie's *Moby-Dick*, which was recorded and telecast on PBS's *Great Performances*. In 2017, he was awarded an honorary doctor of music degree from Indiana University. This past summer he conducted *La favorite* at Gran Teatre del Liceu, and he conducted *It's a Wonderful Life* at SFO during the holidays. Earlier this season at HGO, he conducted *The Flying Dutchman* and *Florencia en el Amazonas*.


DAVID FARLEY
(UNITED KINGDOM)
Set and Costume Designer

David Farley's set and costume designs have previously been seen at HGO in *La bohème* earlier this season and also in 2012. Credits as designer include

Sunday in the Park with George in New York and the West End, winning Olivier Awards for best design and best musical production at the Wyndhams. He was nominated for costume design and set design at the 2008 Tony Awards for *Sunday in the Park with George*. His credits in the West End include *The Comedy about a Bank Robbery*, *McQueen*, *Daddy Long Legs*, *A Little Night Music*, and *Little Shop of Horrors*, and on Broadway, *A Little Night Music* and *13*. Further credits include *Flood* in Hull; *Snapshots*, *Take Flight*, *Travesties*, and *Are You There, McPhee?* in the United States; and the tours of *Million Dollar Quartet*, *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and *Crush*.



**MICHAEL JAMES CLARK
(UNITED STATES)**

Lighting Designer

Michael James Clark is the lighting supervisor for HGO, where he has designed or realized lighting for numerous operas. He was the lighting

designer for *La bohème* earlier this season, and last season, he redesigned the original lighting for *Elektra* specifically for HGO's Resilience Theater, the temporary performance space HGO built for its season-long displacement due to Hurricane Harvey. He has also designed lighting for the HGOco world premieres of *Some Light Emerges* (2017), *After the Storm* (2016), and *O Columbia* (2015); *Otello* (2014); *Die Fledermaus*, *Aida*, and *Il trovatore* (2013); *La bohème*, *La traviata*, and *The Rape of Lucretia* (2012); *The Marriage of Figaro* (2011); the world premiere of *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* (2010); and outdoor productions of *The Barber of Seville*, *The Elixir of Love*, *Tosca*, *The Magic Flute*, *Die Fledermaus*, *La bohème*, *Madame Butterfly*, and *Rigoletto*. In addition to his work at HGO, he has designed lighting for Stages Repertory Theatre productions of *The Great American Trailer Park Christmas Musical* (2013), *Honky Tonk Angels* (2015), and *The Marvelous Wonderettes: Dream On* (2016). For Rice University's Shepherd School of Music, he lit Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music* and *The Coronation of Poppea*. He holds a bachelor's degree in lighting design from North Carolina School of the Arts.



**TIM CLAYDON
(UNITED KINGDOM)**

Choreographer/Movement Director

Tim Claydon's work was previously seen at HGO in *Don Carlos* and *La traviata* (both in 2012), as well as *The Elixir of Love* (2016). He also served as

revival director and choreographer in outdoor performances of *The Elixir of Love* in 2017. Trained in classical dance, Claydon was an aerialist/trapeze artist and worked as a principal performer in the Millennium Dome central

show, *OVO*. He has choreographed productions including *Pyramus and Thisbe* (Canadian Opera Co); *Parsifal* (Lyric Opera of Chicago); *Andrea Chénier* (Opera North); *Carmen* (Vlaamse Opera); *La rondine* and *Albert Herring* (Opera North); *The Elixir of Love* (Welsh National Opera, Opera North, and Oviedo); *Falstaff* and *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (Opera North, Melbourne, and Sydney); *La bohème* and *The Bartered Bride* (Opera North, Valencia, and New Zealand); and *Rusalka* and *The Fortunes of King Croesus* (Opera North and Minnesota). As assistant director for Opera North, Claydon has worked on productions including *The Bartered Bride*, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, *The Merry Widow*, *Das Rheingold*, *La clemenza di Tito*, a revival of *Peter Grimes*, and *Gianni Schicchi*, in which he also appeared in the roles of Dante and Buoso Donati. He is event producer and artistic director for an aerial production company he founded, 4D Circus.



**RICHARD BADO
(UNITED STATES)**

**Sarah and Ernest Butler Chorus
Master Chair**

Chorus Master

Richard Bado, an alumnus of the HGO Studio (1984–85), is director

of artistic operations and chorus master for HGO. Bado made his professional conducting debut in 1989, leading HGO's acclaimed production of *Show Boat* at the newly restored Cairo Opera House in Egypt. Since then, he has conducted at La Scala, Opéra national de Paris, New York City Opera, the Aspen Music Festival, Tulsa Opera, the Russian National Orchestra, the Florida Philharmonic, the Montreal Symphony, and Wolf Trap Opera. This season, he conducted performances of *The Nutcracker* for the Houston Ballet. An accomplished pianist, Bado appears regularly with Renée Fleming in recital, including a tour this past fall. He has also played for Cecilia Bartoli, Frederica von Stade, Susan Graham, Denyce Graves, Marcello Giordani, Ramón Vargas, Samuel Ramey, Jamie Barton, Ryan McKinny, and Nathan Gunn. Bado holds music degrees from the Eastman School of Music, where he received the 2000 Alumni Achievement Award, and West Virginia University, and he studied advanced choral conducting with Robert Shaw. For 12 years, he was the director of the opera studies program at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music. He has served on the faculties of the Aspen Music Festival and School, the Dolores Zajick Institute for Young Dramatic Voices, the International Vocal School in Moscow, and the Texas Music Festival. He received HGO's Silver Rose Award (2013) in honor of his 25th anniversary as chorus master.



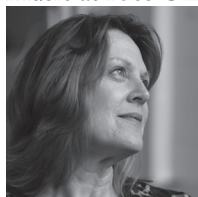
**KAREN REEVES
(UNITED STATES)**

Children's Chorus Director

Karen Reeves has been working with young singers at HGO since 1991.

She is a Grammy Award winner, having served as chorus master for

the HGO Children's Chorus in the Houston Symphony's performance of Berg's *Wozzeck*, which won the 2017 Grammy for Best Opera Performance. She has prepared the HGO Children's Chorus and child soloists for such operas as *Otello*, *Carmen*, *La bohème*, *Dead Man Walking*, *Tosca*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and *The Little Prince*, and last season, she prepared HGO's Juvenile Chorus for the world premiere of *The House without a Christmas Tree*. She was a member of the Houston Grand Opera Chorus for 13 seasons, and during the 1999–2000 season, she became the founding director of the High School Voice Studio, HGO's intensive program for high school students preparing for further vocal music study. She received her bachelor of music degree from Southwestern University and her master of music degree from Rice University. She taught on the voice faculty at Houston Baptist University, and for more than 20 years she taught in the voice department of Houston's High School for the Performing and Visual Arts as an artist consultant. She is the opera program administrator at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University.



**DENISE TARRANT
(UNITED STATES)**

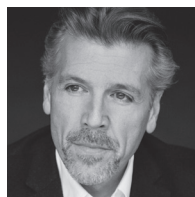
**Sarah and Ernest Butler
Concertmaster Chair**

Concertmaster

Texas native Denise Tarrant began her professional violin career at the age of

16 with the Midland-Odessa (Texas) Symphony. Afterward she studied at the University of Houston, Rice University, Trinity University (London), and the Royal College of Music (London). She became HGO's concertmaster under the baton of Patrick Summers in 1999. Highlights of her work at HGO include the world premieres of Ricky Ian Gordon's *The House without a Christmas Tree* (2017), Jake Heggie's *It's a Wonderful Life* (2016), Carlisle Floyd's *Cold Sassy Tree* (2000), and Tod Machover's *Resurrection* (1999), as well as Floyd's *Of Mice and Men* (2002) and Catán's *Florencia en el Amazonas* (2001), all of which have been released on CD. She further performed in the world premieres of Carlisle Floyd's *Prince of Players* (2016); André Previn's *Brief Encounter* (2009); Heggie's *Three Decembers* (2008) and *The End of the Affair* (2004); Mark Adamo's *Lysistrata* (2005); Catán's *Salsipuedes* (2004); and Rachel Portman's *The Little Prince* (2003). She performed onstage as the solo violinist in *Julius Caesar* last season

and also when the production debuted in 2003. She has been concertmaster of the Houston Ballet Orchestra since 1988 and has been featured as a violin soloist in numerous Houston Ballet productions including Stanton Welch's *Maninyas* (Ross Edward's Violin Concerto), *Clear* (Bach's Concerto for Violin and Oboe), *The Four Seasons* (Vivaldi), and Natalie Weir's *Steppenwolf* (Bruch Violin Concerto).



**THOMAS HAMPSON
(UNITED STATES)**

Lynn Wyatt Great Artist 2018–19

Baritone—Lorenzo Da Ponte

Thomas Hampson is making his HGO debut. His numerous international honors include being

named a Met Mastersinger by the Metropolitan Opera Guild; being inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and Gramophone's Hall of Fame; winning the Grammy Award, Edison Award, and the Grand Prix du Disque; receiving the 2009 Distinguished Artistic Leadership Award from the Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C.; serving as the New York Philharmonic's first-ever artist-in-residence; winning the Concertgebouw Prize; and receiving a Living Legend Award in 2010 from the Library of Congress. Notable engagements earlier this season included his debut at the Canadian Opera Company, singing the title role in the world premiere of Rufus Wainwright's *Hadrian* and performing one of his signature roles, Scarpia in *Tosca*, at the Vienna State Opera. Later in 2019, he will return to La Scala as Altair in Strauss's *Die ägyptische Helena*. Hampson frequently gives recitals all over the world with his longtime musical partner, Wolfram Rieger. He began his Schubert Week in January at Berlin's Pierre Boulez Hall with an all-Schubert program; this summer, he will be seen in recital at the Opernhaus Zürich as well as the Schubertiade in Austria. Among many concert engagements this season, Hampson performed Britten's *War Requiem* in Vienna with the Vienna Symphony under Philippe Jordan, in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I.



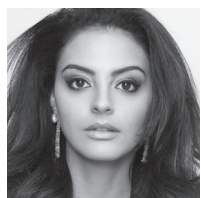
LUCA PISARONI (ITALY)

**Bass-baritone—Enzo/
Young Da Ponte**

Luca Pisaroni has been seen at HGO as Méphistophélès in *Faust* (2016) and Count Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro* (2011). His

2018–19 schedule began with a return to the Teatro Real in Madrid to sing Méphistophélès in a new production of *Faust* by La fura dels Baus, followed by his role debut as the Four Villains in Offenbach's *Les contes d'Hoffmann* at the Baden-Baden Festspielhaus and his house debut at

the Gran Teatre del Liceu as Mustafà in *L'italiana in Algeri*. Additionally, he returned to the Metropolitan Opera for his debut in the title role of *Don Giovanni*, followed by Méphistophélès in Berlioz's *La damnation de Faust* with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra led by Manfred Honeck. Later this season he will return to the Berlin State Opera as Golaud in *Pelléas et Mélisande* and will end his operatic season at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, in his role debut as Escamillo in *Carmen*. Pisoni also performs extensively in concert and recital: a few recent/upcoming engagements include Mozart's C Minor Mass and Requiem at the Brucknerhaus; Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the Gewandhaus Orchester conducted by Andris Nelsons, Rossini's *Petite messe solennelle* at Royal Festival Hall in London and Schönberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* at the Laeiszhalle; a series of recitals with pianist Malcolm Martineau at the Grand Théâtre de Genève and at the Pierre Boulez Saal; and several "No Tenors Allowed" concerts with baritone Thomas Hampson in Boston, Toronto, and Santa Fe.



**RIHAB CHAIEB
(CANADA/TUNISIA)**

**Mezzo-soprano—
Maria Malibran (etc.)**

Tunisian-born Rihab Chaieb is making her HGO debut. She is an alumna of the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann

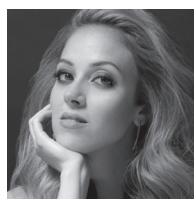
Young Artist Program; the Canadian Opera Company's Ensemble Studio, where she performed Sesto in *La clemenza di Tito*; and San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Program, where she sang Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro*. With Glyndebourne Festival Opera, she sang Mercédès in David McVicar's production of *Carmen* with Jakub Hruša and Flora in *La traviata* with Andrés Orozco-Estrada. After a Metropolitan Opera debut as Zulma in *L'italiana in Algeri*, Chaieb has returned to that stage as Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, Lola (*Cavalleria rusticana*) under Nicola Luisotti, Laura (*Luisa Miller*) under Bertrand de Billy, and Sandman (*Hänsel und Gretel*) under Donald Runnicles. Performances elsewhere include creating the role of the Fairy Prince in the world premiere of David Hertzberg's *The Wake World* for Opera Philadelphia, Tebaldo in *Don Carlo* for her debut at Opéra national de Bordeaux, and both Juno and Ino in *Semele* in Toronto. She won third prize in the 2018 Operalia Competition. This season, she debuted as the title role in Offenbach's *Fantasio* at Opéra et Orchestre national de Montpellier and sang Kasturbai in *Satyagraha* at Opera Vlaanderen. Later this season, she will sing Dorabella in *Così fan tutte* at Teatro Santiago de Chile and Cherubino with Cincinnati Opera.



**CHAD SHELTON
(UNITED STATES)**

Tenor—Patrick Kelly (etc.)

HGO Studio alumnus Chad Shelton (1997–2000) appears regularly at HGO, most recently as Pollione in *Norma* and Aegisth in *Elektra* (both in 2018); Mao Tse-tung in *Nixon in China* (2017); Cavaradossi in performances of *Tosca* (2015–16); Charles II in the world premiere of Carlisle Floyd's *Prince of Players* (2016); Froh in *Das Rheingold* and Fredrik Egerman in *A Little Night Music* (2014); and Alfredo in *La traviata* (2012), among many others. Earlier this season, he reprised Pollione with North Carolina Opera, Don José in *Carmen* on tour in Japan for a second time as a guest artist of the Seiji Ozawa Music Academy Opera Project, Roderigo in *Otello* at the Metropolitan Opera, and Charles II in *Prince of Players* with Florentine Opera (for commercial release). Future engagements include returns to HGO next season for his first performances of Herod in *Salome* and the Witch of Endor in *Saul* as well as Pollione with Calgary Opera. Recent performances include a return to the Grand Théâtre de Genève for his first performances of Sir Edgar Aubry in *Der Vampyr*, Don José in *Carmen* with Austin Opera, his Metropolitan Opera debut as Roderigo in a new production of *Otello*, and his first Erik in *The Flying Dutchman* with Boston Lyric Opera. With Opéra national de Lorraine, he performed the title role in *Idomeneo*, Giasone in *Medea*, Don José, Jack in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and many others.



LAUREN SNOUFFER (UNITED STATES)

Soprano—Giulietta (etc.)

HGO Studio alumna Lauren Snouffer (2011–13) appears regularly at HGO, most recently creating the leading role of Addie Mills in the world

premiere of *The House without a Christmas Tree* (2017). Other HGO roles include Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro* (2016); Ellie May Chipley in *Show Boat* (2013); Elvira in *The Italian Girl in Algiers* (2012), and Rosina in performances of *The Barber of Seville* (2012). This season, she sang the title role of Berg's *Lulu* in a new production at the Teatro Municipal de Santiago conducted by Pedro-Pablo Prudencio and directed by Mariame Clément, appeared as Romilda in a new production of *Serse* for the Internationale Händel-Festspiele Karlsruhe directed by Max Emanuel Cencic and conducted by George Petrou. In the summer, she will sing the role of Magnolia Hawks in Francesca Zambello's production of *Show Boat* for the Glimmerglass Festival. She has performed with Lyric Opera of Chicago in *Rusalka*, *La clemenza di*

Tito, and a new production of *Orphée et Eurydice* directed and choreographed by John Neumeier under the baton of Harry Bicket; made her Seattle Opera debut as La Comtesse Adèle in Rossini's *Le comte Ory* conducted by Giacomo Sagripanti; performed *The Magic Flute* at Seattle Opera and Lyric Opera of Kansas City; and sang in a new production of Hasse's *Siroe* at the Opéra royal de Versailles, with additional performances in Budapest and Vienna.



**ELIZABETH SUTPHEN
(UNITED STATES)**

Soprano—Faustina (etc.)

Elizabeth Sutphen is making her HGO debut. A former member of the Opera Studio at Oper Frankfurt, Sutphen performed numerous

roles there, including her debut as Tiny in Britten's *Paul Bunyan* (directed by Brigitte Fassbaender), Romilda in Handel's *Xerxes*, Die Heilige Jungfrau in Honegger's *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher*, all new productions, and Papagena in *The Magic Flute*. She began the 2017–18 season with her debut at Kentucky Opera singing the role of Zerbinetta in Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Her season at Oper Frankfurt included representing the theater in the prestigious Stella Maris Competition, concerts around Frankfurt, and performances as Lisa in *La sonnambula*. In the summer of 2018, she made her role and company debut as Sophie in *Der Rosenkavalier* for Glyndebourne Festival Opera. On the concert stage, she joined the Orchestre national de Lille for performances celebrating Leonard Bernstein's contributions to Broadway, made her Viennese debut in performances with the famed Vienna Boys' Choir, and sang the works of Pergolesi with Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra under the baton of Riccardo Minasi. Earlier this season, she returned to Oper Frankfurt as a guest artist to perform Atalanta in *Xerxes* and Zerbinetta.

LORENZO'S TRAVELS

The librettist and subject of the new opera *The Phoenix* lived during an exciting period in world history.

1749

Lorenzo Da Ponte is born Emanuele Conegliano on March 10 to Jewish parents in **Ceneda, Italy**.

George II grants charter to Ohio Company to settle the Ohio Valley

1752

Ben Franklin discovers electricity

1764

Family converts to Roman Catholicism; Emanuele's name changes to Lorenzo Da Ponte

Saint Louis founded as a French trading post

1789

*George Washington elected first U.S. President
French Revolution begins*

1786

Da Ponte and Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* triumphs

1790

Così fan tutte premieres; Emperor Joseph II dies.

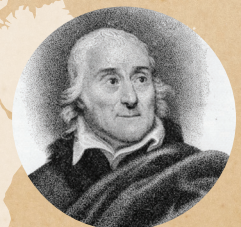


Mozart

1791

Mozart dies; Da Ponte dismissed from court

U.S. Bill of Rights ratified



Da Ponte

1792

Da Ponte sets off for Paris with a letter of recommendation from the late emperor to his sister, Marie Antoinette. Detours to **London** after receiving news of her arrest.

New York Stock Exchange established

1803

Works as a grocer and as the librettist for the King's Theatre; begins publishing

U.S. purchases Louisiana Territory from France



King's Theatre, London

1804

The famous Hamilton-Burr duel occurs (different show)

Napoleon becomes emperor of France

1769

Enters the Seminary of Portogruaro to receive a top-notch education

Daniel Boone begins exploring Kentucky

1773

Ordained as a priest; relocates to nearby **Venice** and becomes immersed in the night life

Boston Tea Party



Young Da Ponte

1776

Declaration of Independence ratified

1779

Banished from Venice for “public concubinage”

1780

Lured by the promise of a court position in **Dresden, Germany**, he moves there only to find out he has been tricked by an enemy.

1783

Appointed court poet by Emperor Joseph II; begins to write opera libretti

American Revolution hostilities cease



Emperor Joseph II

1781

Relocates to **Vienna, Austria**, where he will meet composer Antonio Salieri, Emperor Joseph II, and Mozart.

Articles of Confederation adopted



Antonio Salieri

1805

To escape debt, Da Ponte journeys to America and the family settles in **New York City**. Several of Da Ponte’s business ventures fail.

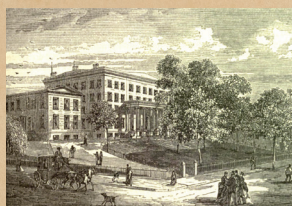
Napoleon crowned king of Italy

1811

The Da Pontes move to the **Susquehanna Valley in Pennsylvania**. Da Ponte is at first successful as a merchant, but his fortunes again take a turn for the worse.

1814

Napoleon is defeated at Waterloo, and the process of Italian unification begins.



Columbia College, New York City

1819

Da Ponte travels back to **New York**, opens a bookstore, and is the first professor of Italian literature at Columbia College (now University).

1828

Becomes a U.S. citizen



Da Ponte

1833

Builds New York’s first opera house

1836

Sells the opera house to pay the company’s debts

1838

Da Ponte passes away on August 17.

Although he never achieved fame and riches, he is the star of our story, with 29 known operas and collaborations with 11 different composers. He lived in America during six presidencies, from Thomas Jefferson through Martin Van Buren.



ossia l'europeo negli Stati Uniti

HGO Dramaturg Jeremy Johnson explains why *The Phoenix*—Tarik O'Regan and John Caird's new opera about the Italian librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte—is essentially an American story.

BY JEREMY JOHNSON
Dramaturg

MOST PEOPLE who have been going to the opera for a few years know that “the Da Ponte operas” were written by Mozart. But perhaps we should be more precise: those operas—*The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan tutte*—were composed by Mozart. Their libretti were written by Lorenzo Da Ponte, a man from the small town of Ceneda, Italy, seven years older than the Salzburg composer: a man who, for all of his 89 years of life, is entirely known for a scant five years during which he collaborated with a musical genius. His other 84 years, though, are arguably even more interesting. Da Ponte seemed to think so, too, writing three different editions of his memoirs over the last 15 years of his life.

Da Ponte’s memoirs are somewhere between hyperbole and fabrication. He took plenty of liberties in telling his own story. But sifting through the facts paints a picture of a remarkably fascinating life—one that traversed five countries, two continents, three languages, and at least ten different careers that ran the

gamut from the Holy Roman Emperor’s court poet to a bankrupt grocery store owner in Manhattan. Da Ponte lived many different lives, but his first biographer, Joseph Russo, summed it up well: “Da Ponte’s connection to Mozart is now generally considered to be his greatest claim to lasting remembrance, yet perhaps of equal, if not even greater, importance, at least in America and Italy, should be deemed his having been one of the foremost pioneers of Italian culture in the United States.”

Living in the United States for the last 33 years of his life, Da Ponte championed Italian literature, the language of his beloved Boccaccio, Petrarch, Metastasio, and Dante—and, of course, Italian opera.

Da Ponte is entirely known for a scant five years during which he collaborated with a musical genius. His other 84 years, though, are arguably more interesting.

He even raised—in only six weeks—what would today be almost five million dollars, all to build the very first opera house in New York City. He was 27 years old when America was born, and 79 years old when he became an American citizen.

Tarik O’Regan, composer of *The Phoenix*, says that Da Ponte’s connection to the United States is what inspired the opera. “It began with an article I wrote for the *Guardian* newspaper on European émigré composers and their work in New

York—Britten, Bartók, Mahler—and this whole body of work created in America by European artists. And part of that was my discovery of just how much time Da Ponte had spent in the United States.” O’Regan—an immigrant and now an American citizen himself—would go on to become intrigued by this juxtaposition of time and place: Da Ponte was an “old world European” living at the same time the new world was being established. Librettist John Caird points out that Da Ponte and Mozart were writing *Don Giovanni* “on the very same nights that Hamilton and Madison were putting the final touches on the Constitution in September 1787. That, to me, is absolutely fascinating.”

For O’Regan and Caird, Da Ponte’s life is an American story—an immigrant story. His connection to America started almost three decades before moving here. While teaching at the Treviso seminary, he wrote political and philosophical poems for his students to recite that questioned the authority of a tyrannical monarchy. The year he wrote these revolutionary words? 1776. Caird points out that one of the poems was titled “The American in Europe”: “He’s hearing, clearly, all about the revolution in America and the Declaration of Independence. Da Ponte’s destination as an artist, from the very beginning, seemed obvious to be America.”

Those poems, though, resulted in his dismissal from his post and a lifelong ban from teaching in the Venetian Republic. The Venetian Senate formally rebuked the Treviso seminary and ordered an official inquiry into the “radicalization” of schools throughout the republic. That wouldn’t be the last time Da Ponte’s penmanship landed him in hot water.

Following only two years in Venice, he was put on trial. Officially, his trial was for infidelity—as a Catholic priest fathering illegitimate children with his live-in mistress—but the authorities had known about that and turned a blind eye for years. Perhaps not coincidentally, mere weeks before his trial he had written an ode in defense of his friend



John Caird and Tarik O'Regan on the set during early rehearsals.
Photo by Natalie Barron.



Patrick Summers conducted a workshop of *The Phoenix* last August.
Photo by Lynn Lane.

Giorgio Pisani, who had been accused of being a political dissident. Again, Da Ponte found his political views—and his willingness to write publicly about them—under fire from the European authorities. He fled Venice before his trial was over but was sentenced to a 15-year banishment from all lands of the Venetian Republic.

Ending up in Vienna, Da Ponte enjoyed ten years of prosperity as poet to the court for Italian opera, under the reign of Emperor Joseph II. It was here that he met and collaborated with Mozart, Salieri, and Martín y Soler. When Joseph died, his younger brother Leopold II ascended to the throne, and Da Ponte was subsequently removed from his post as Italian poet. Convinced that his “enemies” had conspired against him, he wrote a sardonic ode to the new emperor, publicly embarrassing him. One line in particular prophesied the unfortunate outcome for the Italian poet, when he wrote to Leopold, “my fate does not depend on you, because all your power, and all the powers of possible kinds, have no rights over my soul.” Da Ponte found himself banished indefinitely from Vienna.

A 12-year stint in London ended in bankruptcy, overwhelming debt, and a warrant for his arrest—but a tip from a friendly policeman gave Da Ponte enough time to flee yet another of his adopted homes. He boarded a ship for America, where he would make his home for the last 33 years of his life. He

landed in America the same year that the Lewis and Clark Expedition arrived at the Pacific Ocean. O'Regan was drawn to this merger of time and place. “The Commissioners’ Plan of 1811 [in New York] was this incredibly visionary idea to build and plan out miles of this absolutely rigid grid of streets, but that happened while the co-writer of three of the most important works of the core classical repertory was living in the city at the same time. I was fascinated by that, but it was very strange—it felt like the old world was meeting the new.”

O'Regan also moved to New York—two hundred years after Da Ponte did—and points out that he was naturalized as a U.S. citizen in a ceremony of almost identical wording to the one Da Ponte would have had. “It’s an incredibly fast, progressive country that he’s now a part of. I’ve always been interested in this link between inextricably European characters and definitive eras in the United States—Stravinsky and Schoenberg living in Los Angeles during the Golden Age of Hollywood—you don’t really think of these worlds colliding, but they do.”

That collision of place and culture applies to O'Regan, as well, who grew up in a multi-cultural family. Patrick Summers, HGO’s Artistic and Music Director as well as conductor of *The Phoenix*, describes O'Regan’s background as ideal for composing Da Ponte’s operatic biography. “Tarik is the finest exemplar of the diverse trend of 21st-century composition: fusion. He has a

British father and Algerian mother, and his childhood, spent variously between London, Algeria, and Morocco, instilled in him a deep interest and intellectual rigor about world culture, all of which he incorporates into his music. Tarik’s compositional voice is both highly lyrical and movingly intellectual; he is that real rarity: a thinking heart and a feeling brain. Tarik O'Regan is the perfect choice to bring us musically into the world of a genius who transited many cultures.”

As the world becomes more interconnected than ever, we see daily the influence of rapid globalization and cultural diversity. Perhaps it is easy to take for granted the influence that Italian culture has had on American life, but it’s even easier to forget that it all started with an immigrant. Da Ponte’s unending enthusiasm and zealous love for both of his homes—Italy and America—compelled him to unite the best parts of each. The man who wrote the libretti for three of our most beloved Italian operas? He was an American. As O'Regan puts it: “There are always these strange collisions of time and culture...things aren’t as far apart as you think.” ■

Editor’s note: The opera’s full title, *The Phoenix, or The Operatic Adventures of Lorenzo Da Ponte on Two Continents in Two Acts*, and the title of this article reflect the common practice during Mozart and Da Ponte’s time of adding taglines to opera titles. *Don Giovanni*’s full title, for example, is *Il dissoluto punito, ossia Il Don Giovanni* (The libertine punished, or Don Giovanni).