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Houston Arts Alliance's Folklife + Traditional Arts and Houston Grand Opera Present

STORM SONGS & STORIES

*Multimedia, open mic to feature stories, spoken word pieces,
poems and songs about Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Ike*

HOUSTON (April 1, 2016) – Houston and Galveston, like any city along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts of the U.S., are always vulnerable to tropical weather. The most frightening of these events is the hurricane, with its fierce winds and massive storm surges that can spell devastation for anything in its path. Hurricanes such as Katrina, Rita and Ike in this region—and even earlier, the Great Storm of Galveston in 1900—are all too familiar in this part of the U.S.

STORM SONGS & STORIES was inspired by the voices of the multitudes of storm survivors. In anticipation of Houston Grand Opera's May 2016 world premiere of *After the Storm*, Houston Grand Opera (HGO) and the Houston Arts Alliance Folklife + Traditional Arts program will present the multimedia *STORM SONGS & STORIES*, on Wednesday, May 4, 2016, at 8 p.m. at Rudyard's, 2010 Waugh Drive.

The program's open mic format will feature first timers and seasoned vets sharing their stories, spoken word pieces, songs and poems on the subject of these storms. The general public is invited to participate as audience and/or performer. The format is solo performances only with a five-minute time limit, based on first come, first served. There is no cover charge.

STORM SONGS & STORIES is an outgrowth of two major projects—a 2005 storytelling project, titled *Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston*, and Houston Grand Opera's *After the Storm*.

The storytelling project, led by University of Houston Professor Carl Lindahl and public folklorist and current HAA Folklife + Traditional Arts Director Pat Jasper, entailed Houston-based hurricane survivors interviewing more than 400 fellow survivors. Most of the resulting narratives now reside in the collections of the Library of Congress.

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The chamber opera, a story of loss, resilience and the power of community, was developed through research and interviews with Galveston and Houston residents, mining the legacy of Galveston's Great Storm of 1900 and 2008's Hurricane Ike.

In this light, HAA's Folklife program and HGOco came together to create an opportunity for the larger public to participate and share their own hurricane stories in the medium of their choosing. The public is invited to share hurricane stories like this one, written by a Houstonian:

A Good Dog

He's not effusive or clingy or
Even much into being in the same room with me.

But the lights went out at 1:17 a.m., with
Winds howling and rain lashing and bangs
On the roof brought on by Lord knows what.

And for hours, as the storm blew water
Sideways under door jambs and through
Cracks in the ceiling. He stayed
Steadfastly by my side.

He followed me from room to room
As I – flashlight in hand—
Timorously waited out the hurricane.

Few things in life are truer or of
Greater comfort than a good dog in a
Bad storm.

Karen Ross, 2008

Courtesy of Houston. It's Worth It.

For more information, visit houstonartsalliance.com/folklife/current.

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About Houston Arts Alliance

Houston Arts Alliance (HAA) is a nonprofit, public-private initiative that invests in Houston's arts and cultural sector, advances Houston's reputation as an arts and culture destination, and works to elevate the quality of life for all Houstonians through arts and culture. As the city's designated local arts agency, HAA provides programs and services for the arts and cultural sector and awards approximately 225 grants annually to nonprofit arts and cultural organizations and individual artists. The Alliance is the custodian of the city's art collection; takes permanent and temporary art to Houston's public spaces; presents free Folklife + Traditional Arts programming; nurtures up-and-coming arts organizations through its capacity building programs; connects the business community with the arts; convenes the field as necessary, and provides the latest information and research on cultural policy, economic development and Houston's folklife.

HAA's primary partner is the City of Houston. Approximately 55% of HAA's budget comes from Hotel Occupancy Tax and 30% from the City of Houston's Percent for Art Program, which supports commissions of new civic art projects as well as conservation of existing artworks. The remaining 15% of HAA's budget comes from private fundraising (grants/contributions/other revenue) for programs and special projects. HAA is committed to raising funds for only those projects and initiatives that the Arts Alliance is uniquely positioned to provide the community.

For more information, visit houstonartsalliance.com. For events in the region, visit Artshound.com.

About Houston Grand Opera

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 59 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 has won a Tony, two Grammy awards, and two Emmy awards—the only opera company to have won all three honors.

Since 2007, the company's community collaboration initiative, HGOco, has commissioned 19 new works and three song cycles and has 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 *After the Storm*, HGOco endeavors to make opera relevant to its changing audiences by connecting the company with the diverse Houston community through collaboration.

For more information, visit HGO.org.