

**HOUSTON GRAND OPERA UNVEILS ENCHANGING NEW
PRODUCTION OF HANSEL AND GRETEL BY RENOWNED
PUPPETEER BASIL TWIST**

Perfect Holiday Treat for the Whole Family Opens December 1, 2006

October 5, 2006- Houston, TX – This holiday season, Houston Grand Opera (HGO) stages a spectacular new production of Humperdinck's beloved fairy tale opera *Hansel and Gretel* featuring artists from the **HGO Studio** and members of the **HGO Orchestra and Children's Chorus**. Eleven public performances, December 1-23, will offer ample opportunities for Houstonians to enjoy this holiday treat.

The production is directed and designed by America's premier puppeteer **Basil Twist**, whose works have dazzled audiences across the continent (New York, Washington D.C., San Francisco, and Montreal) and in Europe (France, London, and Munich). Called "true magic" by *The New York Times*, Twist's work fuses music and puppetry into spellbinding theatrical experiences. His largest puppet for *Hansel and Gretel* will be a giant witch built by **The Jim Henson Company**, and Twist will build the remaining puppets himself, including several marionettes and *bunraku* puppets.

Hansel and Gretel showcases artists from the internationally acclaimed HGO Studio, one of the world's finest programs for future opera stars. Irish mezzo-soprano **Fiona Murphy** and American soprano **Rebekah Camm** star as the brother and sister who get lost in the woods and are captured by the Witch, sung by American baritone **Liam Bonner**. American soprano **Jennifer Root** and American bass-baritone **Ryan McKinny** sing the Mother and Father, and Russian soprano **Albina Shagimuratova** sings the Sandman and the Dew Fairy. Russian mezz-soprano **Maria Markina** and American soprano **Alicia Gianni** will sing the title roles for three performances, plus a student matinee.

Twist leads the creative team, with lighting by **Gordon W. Olson**. HGO's new Head of Music Staff **Kathleen Kelly** makes her house debut conducting her new chamber orchestration of the familiar score. Children's Chorus Master is **Karen Reeves**. The English translation is by **Cori Ellison**.

Hansel and Gretel opens on Friday, December 1, 2006, at 8:00 p.m. Further performances are on December 7, 13, and 20 at 8:00 p.m., December 3 at 1:30 p.m., and December 10, 17, and 23 at 1:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.



Jim Henson's Creature Shop™ provides performed digital visual effects, animatronic creatures, animation and soft puppets to the international film, television and advertising industries. Based in Los Angeles and New York with satellite shop capabilities internationally, the Shop is known for designing and building some of the world's best-known characters including Elmo from "Sesame Street," Miss Piggy from "The Muppet Show," the Baby from "Dinosaurs," Rygel from "Farscape," and the Skeksis from "The Dark Crystal." Other credits include "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy," "Are We There Yet?," "Five Children and It," the critically acclaimed television series "Farscape," "The English Patient," "101 Dalmatians," and "Cats and Dogs."

A recipient of more than 9 Emmy Awards for its outstanding work building puppets for "Sesame Street," the Shop also received an Academy Award for its visual effects work on the film "Babe." Other awards include a Scientific and Engineering Academy Award for the Henson Performance Control System, a powerful custom-based interface for puppeteers as well as the Computer Graphics World Innovation Award and the prestigious Computerworld Honors 21st Century Achievement Award, which recognizes innovative applications of technology that benefit society. Both computer awards were given to the Shop for its work in developing the Henson Digital Puppetry Studio, a patented control system technology that enables puppeteers to physically perform computer generated (CG) characters in real time.

Jim Henson's Creature Shop is currently in production on "Sid the Science Kid," a 40 episode animated preschool series to air on PBS in the fall of 2008 featuring Henson Digital Puppetry Studio technology and Season 38 of "Sesame Street" for Sesame Workshop.