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THE BIG SWIM RETURNS!

CO-PRODUCTION OF HOUSTON GRAND OPERA AND ASIA SOCIETY TEXAS
CELEBRATES LUNAR NEW YEAR WITH FAMILY-FRIENDLY PERFORMANCES



HOUSTON, January 16, 2025 — [Asia Society Texas](#) (AST) welcomes the return of [The Big Swim!](#) A witty, heartwarming one-act opera sure to delight families and opera lovers alike, *The Big Swim* is a retelling of the Jade Emperor and the Great Race — a fable that sets the order of the 12 animals in the Chinese zodiac calendar. Commissioned by **Houston Grand Opera** in partnership with AST, *The Big Swim* will be presented on [February 7, 8, and 9](#) at AST's Brown Foundation Performing Arts Theater.

In this contemporary retelling of the Great Race created by composer **Meilina Tsui** and librettist **Melisa Tien**, diverse influences are fused into a single, compelling story, intentionally crossing boundaries between traditional and modern, Eastern and Western, and classical and non-classical. *The Big Swim* draws upon a vast

range of cultural elements and stylistic influences, with Tsui's score incorporating opera buffa, Peking and Cantonese opera, Gregorian chants, American and Asian pop music, animated musicals, and more. In Tien's modern take on the classic story, the zodiac animals learn to put aside fierce competition to instead care for and support one another, side by side.

The opera's acclaimed cast includes mezzo-soprano **Alice Chung** (Ox & Pig) and bass **Zaikuan Song** (Dragon & Dog) reprising their roles and joined by soprano **Angela Yam** (Rabbit & Horse), tenor **Mark He** (Monkey & Rat), baritone **Zizhao Wang** (Tiger & Rooster), and mezzo-soprano **Qirong Liang** (Snake & Sheep). Originally directed by **Mo Zhou**, the production will be directed this year by **Kihwa Nam**, while **Eiki Isomura**, artistic director and principal conductor of **Opera in the Heights**, returns to conduct the production.

Mask and scenic designer **Afsaneh Aayani** is the creator of the opera's dynamic modular set, which draws inspiration from traditional Chinese garden designs while paying homage to East Asian cultures and the Lunar New Year celebrations that unite them. **Valérie Thérèse Bart's** vibrant costume designs combine influences from the Philippines, South Korea, China, and Vietnam. **Michael James Clark**, the Head of Lighting and Production Media for HGO, serves as the opera's lighting designer.

The Big Swim will be presented at Asia Society Texas as part of its Lunar New Year festivities and will be preceded by activities, including shadow puppets, calligraphy demonstrations, and an original children's dance piece "The Giant Serpent" by **Nao Kusuzaki** celebrating the Year of the Snake.



THE BIG SWIM FAST FACTS

- **Dates:** Friday, February 7 at 7:30pm; Saturday, February 8 at 2pm; Sunday, February 9 at 2pm
- **Pre-show activities:** Begin one hour before the performance
- **Admission:** \$40; \$30 for AST members
- **Location:** Asia Society Texas, 1370 Southmore Blvd., Houston, TX, 77004 (in the Museum District)
- **More info:** asiasociety.org/texas/events/big-swim-2025

ABOUT ASIA SOCIETY TEXAS

Asia Society Texas believes in the strength and beauty of diverse perspectives and people. As an educational institution, we advance cultural exchange by celebrating the vibrant diversity of Asia, inspiring empathy, and fostering a better

understanding of our interconnected world. Spanning the fields of arts, business, culture, education, and policy, our programming is rooted in the educational and cultural development of our community — trusting in the power of art, dialogue, and ideas to combat bias and build a more inclusive society.

The Big Swim is a co-production of Houston Grand Opera and Asia Society Texas.

The Big Swim at Asia Society Texas is generously supported by Zodiac Circle founding donors Chinhui and Eddie Allen, Nancy C. Allen, The Takashima Family, Janae and Ken Tsai, Anne and Albert Chao, Drs. Julie and Stephen Chen, Kathy and Marty Goossen, Sue and Randy Sim, and Michelle and Rishi Varma. New support for The Big Swim in 2025 provided by Jae and Madeline Lee, Janie and Eric Moon, and Robert Gondo. Additional support is provided by Ann and Jay Cuclis, Joyce Wealth Management, LLC, Teri and Jeff Lee, and Mitsubishi Corporation (Americas).

Performing Arts and Culture programs at Asia Society Texas are presented by Syamal and Susmita Poddar. Major support comes from Nancy C. Allen, Chinhui Juhn and Eddie Allen, The Brown Foundation, Inc., the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance, Houston Endowment Inc. Generous funding also provided by The Anchorage Foundation of Texas, The Cullen Trust for the Performing Arts, and Mitsubishi Corporation (Americas), National Endowment for the Arts, Texas Commission on the Arts, and the Wortham Foundation. Additional support is provided by The Clayton Fund, and the Friends of Asia Society, a dedicated group of individuals and organizations committed to bringing exceptional programming to Asia Society Texas.