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2025-26 SEASON | SFOPERA.COM



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Dead Man Walking

BY JAKE HEGGIE AND TERENCE MCNALLY



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SAN FRANCISCO
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Vol. 103, No. 2 • 2025–26 Season • September 2025

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AT A GLANCE AND SYNOPSIS

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AT A GLANCE

Rigoletto

MUSIC BY **GIUSEPPE VERDI** • LIBRETTTO BY **FRANCESCO MARIA PIAVE**

Structure: 3 acts, with one intermission after Act I

Running time: 2 hours, 35 minutes

Language: Sung in Italian with English supertitles

Key Characters:

- *Rigoletto*, court jester to the Duke of Mantua
- *Gilda*, Rigoletto's daughter who loves the duke
- *Duke of Mantua*, a capricious womanizer who disguises himself as the student Gualtier Maldè
- *Sparafucile*, a hired assassin

Giuseppe Verdi's 1851 opera centers around Rigoletto, a jester who hurls insults at court for the amusement of the duke. At home, Rigoletto is a loving, protective father to a daughter he keeps hidden from the world. When a victim of Rigoletto's

cruelty curses him, the private life he has worked to keep secret begins to unravel with tragic consequences. The fast-paced action of Verdi's brilliant score, filled with turbulent drama and memorable tunes, made the opera a breakout hit. *Rigoletto* marks the beginning of Verdi's "middle period," when the composer produced a series of classics in rapid succession, including *Il Trovatore* (1853), *La Traviata* (1853), and *Un Ballo in Maschera* (1859).

Listen for: In the first few minutes of the opera, the duke sings "Questa o quella," a catchy ode to the allure of women. In the last act, he sings one of opera's most famous melodies, "La donna è mobile," again reflecting his caddish ideas about women. What do these two earworm arias tell us about the duke's evolution (or lack thereof) throughout the opera?

Dead Man Walking

MUSIC BY **JAKE HEGGIE** • LIBRETTTO BY **TERRENCE McNALLY**

Structure: 2 acts, with one intermission

Running time: 2 hours, 52 minutes

Language: Sung in English with English supertitles

Key Characters:

- *Sister Helen Prejean*, a nun and spiritual advisor to the condemned Joseph De Rocher
- *Joseph De Rocher*, a convicted killer on death row
- *Mrs. Patrick De Rocher*, Joseph's mother

Dead Man Walking is based on the 1993 best-selling memoir of Sister Helen Prejean chronicling her experiences as spiritual advisor to a death row inmate. When the condemned man refuses to acknowledge his guilt or take responsibility for his crimes, Sister Helen journeys through pain, conflict, and grief to help Joseph find his way to the truth and the redemptive

power of love. Adapted into an Oscar-winning film in 1995 starring Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn, Sister Helen's story also inspired Bay Area composer Jake Heggie and legendary playwright Terrence McNally to create their first opera which premiered at San Francisco Opera in 2000. Filled with motifs that reveal insights into the characters along with haunting uses of silence, Heggie's incisive, lyrical score conveys the strong emotional world of this true story. The opera has been performed on five continents and in more than 80 productions, making it the most performed new opera of the last 25 years.

Did you know? The two pop songs heard on the car radio in the opening scene ("Watching You" and "A Kiss in the Dark") were composed by Jake Heggie for the opera. They are provided, along with orchestra parts, when an opera company produces *Dead Man Walking*.



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DIRECTED BY WEYNI MENGESHA

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DIRECTED BY
FELIX BARRETT

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WELCOME FROM THE BOARD OF SAN FRANCISCO OPERA

Welcome to the 103rd Season of San Francisco Opera! We begin a particularly creative year as we embark on a season celebrating new productions and new works, as well as some of the greatest classics in the repertoire.

It is hard to believe how much has transpired since our centennial. That celebratory moment ushered in a thrilling new chapter for the Opera, one that has seen extraordinary artistry at the highest levels of excellence; an increase in the numbers of subscribers, donors, and new audiences; audiences getting younger and coming back more frequently; and a deep commitment to telling stories of meaning and impact. Although the financial model of the arts remains very tenuous, the hunger and energy for opera is strong and growing, and we head into this new season with a great sense of possibility.

Our season begins with *Rigoletto* under the baton of Music Director Eun Sun Kim. Eun Sun illuminates each opera she conducts with such vision and nuance that, even if you've seen a work many times, it can feel as though you're discovering it anew. *Rigoletto* is a searing exploration of human emotions, and with a spectacular cast and Giorgio de Chirico-inspired production, the stage is set for some very exciting performances.

We then return to a very special work for San Francisco Opera: *Dead Man Walking* by Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally. In 2000, this company raised the curtain for the very first time on a new opera that would become the most performed contemporary opera and expand the possibilities of storytelling on the opera stage. We are thrilled to bring back this extraordinary work that explores the boundaries of compassion and forgiveness.

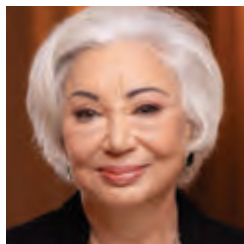
Later this fall we unveil a brand-new production of Wagner's final epic, *Parsifal*—one of the greatest accomplishments of human creativity. And then the world premiere of Huang Ruo and David Henry Hwang's highly anticipated *The Monkey King*. Both operas are selling fast, and we hope that you'll come and experience both these expressions of Bay Area creativity at its finest.

Thank you for celebrating with us the incredible impact possible when all the art forms join together on the opera stage. Here's to a great season ahead!

With gratitude,



Barbara A. Wolfe
Chair of the Board
San Francisco Opera Association



Jack Calhoun
President
San Francisco Opera Association



Paris Opera Ballet *Red Carpet*

A North American Premiere by Hofesh Shechter
 Costumes by CHANEL

The stunning dancers of the Paris Opera Ballet take on Hofesh Shechter's explosive choreography in *Red Carpet*—an eagerly awaited North American premiere. *Red Carpet* is danced to live music and is touring to only two US cities, with just this single West Coast engagement! "Every dance looked fabulous...amorous sensuality and irresistible virtuosity" (*Los Angeles Times*).

Oct 2–4 | ZELLERBACH HALL, BERKELEY



Anne Sofie von Otter, mezzo-soprano Kristian Bezuidenhout, fortepiano

The magisterial mezzo-soprano and acclaimed keyboardist visit for a performance of Schubert's timeless *Schwanengesang* song collection, which explores complex emotional terrain, from love and despair to sorrow and serenity.

Oct 5 | HERTZ HALL, BERKELEY



Philharmonia Orchestra Santtu-Matias Rouvali, *principal conductor* Víkingur Ólafsson, *piano*

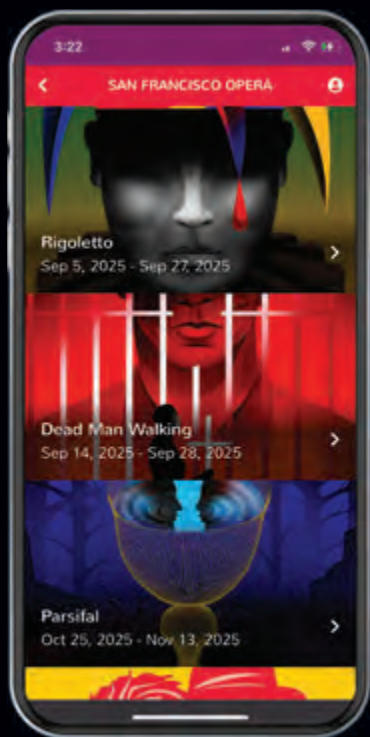
The stellar London-based orchestra returns to Berkeley with Finnish maestro Santtu-Matias Rouvali in two programs featuring 2025–26 season Artist in Residence and incredible pianist Víkingur Ólafsson! Get ready to hear a sublime collection of works, from Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5 and Ravel's Piano Concerto in G Major to an exciting new commission.

Oct 18–19 | ZELLERBACH HALL, BERKELEY



San Francisco Opera at Your Fingertips

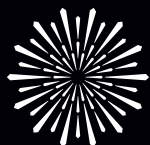
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Your Guide to San Francisco Opera at the War Memorial Opera House

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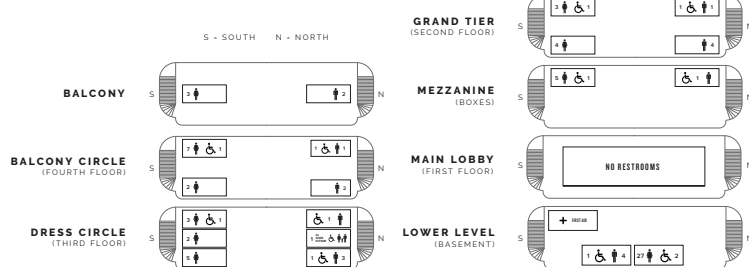
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As you leave the theater, be on the lookout for friendly community ambassadors in orange vests or coats on the front steps of the War Memorial Opera House. These ambassadors are there to assist you.



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Civic Center Ambassadors lead walking groups to BART and the Civic Center & UC Law SF garages after evening performances. They will be holding signs on the Opera House steps facing Van Ness once the performance concludes.

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Patrons desiring a taxi after a performance should come to the Grove Street Taxi Ramp located on the south side of the Opera House. Taxis cannot be guaranteed as service is based on availability of licensed taxis. Please note the Taxi Ramp is not staffed.

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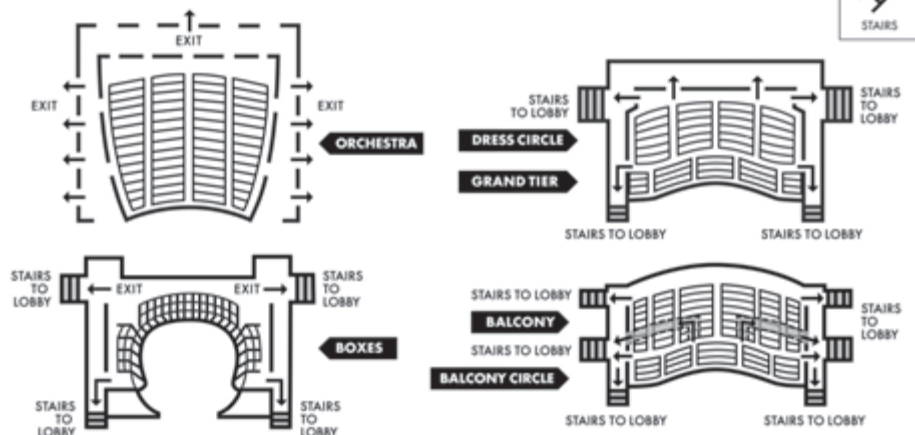
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PATRONS, ATTENTION PLEASE! FIRE NOTICE: Please note the nearest exit. In an emergency, follow any lighted exit sign to the street. **WALK**, do not run, to the nearest exit. Disabled patrons, proceed to nearest elevator lobby and await assistance.

The San Francisco War Memorial acknowledges that we are on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone who are the original inhabitants of the San Francisco Peninsula. As guests, we recognize that we benefit from living and working on their traditional homeland. We wish to pay our respects by acknowledging the ancestors, elders, and relatives of the Ramaytush Community and by affirming their sovereign rights as First Peoples.

Marieke & Jeff Rothschild



NOAH BERGER

The central theme of our philanthropy has been to have a positive impact on the lives of others who have not had the opportunities and good fortune we have enjoyed,” note Marieke and Jeff Rothschild. As champions of San Francisco Opera, they are doing precisely that.

“Marieke and I were raised with the expectation that one should participate in philanthropy, and we feel very fortunate to be able to engage at the scale, scope, and impact that our success has enabled,” remarks Jeff. “We are attracted to projects that have the potential for meaningful and enduring social impact.”

The Rothschilds’ philanthropic investments span health care, education, economic development, and land preservation. They are equally passionate about art. “Great art is something that you need to have a good life,” reflects Marieke. “You could live without beauty, but why would you?”

Live performance is especially close to their hearts. “We come together, taking time out of our busy lives, for

this shared experience,” Marieke explains. “The lights go down, there is a hush. Talented people work in harmony to create something extraordinary for us. By the end, we are all changed. Live music is life affirming.”

The Rothschilds’ commitment to San Francisco Opera comes at a critical moment of inflection for the Company. “Marieke and Jeff are propelling forward the Opera, allowing us to remain bold and courageous in our programming, our innovations, and our community engagement,” observes General Director Matthew Shilvock. “Their philanthropy is a wonderful exemplar of a soaring vision that uplifts the Bay Area. I am profoundly grateful for the trust they are placing in us to produce art that showcases the creative vitality of San Francisco on the global stage.”

“San Francisco Opera is at an interesting crossroads,” Marieke concludes. “I like that they are willing to take chances, to think outside of the box. To adapt this old art form to the modern world requires new audiences and new directions, and we find those here.”

John A. & Cynthia Fry Gunn



TERRENCE MCCARTHY

San Francisco Opera shines as a beacon of innovation, both on and off the stage, driven by the visionary leadership of John and Cynthia Gunn. Their unwavering dedication to creative and cultural initiatives ensures that San Francisco Opera remains one of the world's premier stages. Their philanthropic leadership to the Opera includes a historic contribution in 2008, believed at that time to be the most significant gift ever made by individuals to an American opera company.

A Bay Area native, John's love for opera began in high school through his friendship with Ronald Adler, son of the former General Director of San Francisco Opera Kurt Herbert Adler. John would attend dress rehearsals with Ronald, sitting in the General Director's box. After graduating from Stanford, John began a distinguished career at investment company, Dodge & Cox. There, his belief in long-term investing, empowering management style, and down-to-earth sensibility became benchmarks in the field. John joined the Opera Board in 2002, becoming Chair in 2008, a position he held for sixteen years, during which he made an extraordinary impact on the Company's creative vitality and organizational

stability. In 2024, he assumed the role of Chair Emeritus.

Cynthia Gunn, also an alum of Stanford, began her career as editor and director of the highly regarded *Portable Stanford* series, in which she edited nearly thirty volumes by some of the university's most brilliant minds. Cynthia's philanthropic leadership in the Bay Area includes serving as a Trustee of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, as well as a number of other boards spanning philanthropy, health, education, and the arts.

John and Cynthia's dedication to the Opera reflects their shared belief that a great city deserves a premier opera company that leads the art form and takes bold risks to advance society. Their philanthropic leadership has enabled some of the most significant artistic projects on the San Francisco stage for over two decades, ensuring vital investments in the Company's infrastructure, including the automation and rigging system, as well as the Opera's media suite.

San Francisco Opera is privileged to have the leadership of John and Cynthia, a partnership that began with a high school visit to dress rehearsals and that has blossomed into one of the most defining philanthropic partnerships in American cultural history.

Phyllis C. Wattis Fund for New Productions

Production Sponsor, *Dead Man Walking*



Phyllis C. Wattis and Jake Heggie, 2000

San Francisco Opera has long stood at the vanguard of artistic innovation, continuously pushing the boundaries of creative expression. Few individuals have shaped that identity as profoundly as Phyllis C. Wattis. She had the visionary conviction that opera must engage audiences in unexpected and groundbreaking ways.

Mrs. Wattis supported creators who dared to reimagine the possibilities of art. She funded some of the most important productions staged here, and her legacy continues through The Phyllis C. Wattis Fund for New Productions, supporting in perpetuity works that advance opera in form and subject. Because of Mrs. Wattis, San Francisco Opera continues to commission and present works that address the complexity of our time with artistic rigor and emotional depth.

Mrs. Wattis brought the same energy to every institution she touched, serving as a trustee of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, and the San Francisco Symphony, in addition to San Francisco Opera.

When *Dead Man Walking* was proposed as a subject for an opera, it was Mrs. Wattis who boldly championed its commissioning. Her support helped bring to life other

notable productions, including operas by Tippett, Henze, Berg and Janáček, and world premieres including, during her lifetime, *The Dangerous Liaisons* (1994) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1998), and then through the enduring legacy of her endowment fund, newer works like *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Innocence*.

San Francisco Opera General Director Matthew Shilvock reflects, “Although I never had the privilege of knowing Mrs. Wattis, I feel the enduring legacy of her impact through the deep connection of her family, and through the creative propulsion that she set in motion here. Her endowed funds support not only new productions but also the Opera Center, new audiences, and our general operations. Mrs. Wattis gave us the courage to forge bold new paths, to embrace a dynamic artistic vision, and to ensure the cultural vitality of this great city.”

Mrs. Wattis embraced San Francisco Opera as a living institution that must constantly evolve to reflect the world it serves. She passed away in 2002 at the age of 97, but her vision remains at the heart of the Company. San Francisco Opera is honored to carry forward Mrs. Wattis’ vision and presents this 25th-anniversary production of *Dead Man Walking* in profound gratitude for her belief in the vital importance of art that pushes boundaries.

Jan Shrem & Maria Manetti Shrem



Jan and Maria both developed a love for opera at a young age, despite growing up half a world apart. Jan Shrem, following a successful career in publishing across Japan and Europe, went on to establish Clos Pegase Winery in California's Napa Valley, where he cultivated a world-class collection of modern and contemporary art. Maria Manetti Shrem built an international legacy in fashion entrepreneurship, playing a key role in bringing Gucci and Fendi into U.S. department and specialty stores. Together, they have dedicated their focus and generosity to philanthropy, supporting education, the performing and visual arts, and medical causes.

Though their journeys took them across the globe, their shared passion eventually led them to San Francisco Opera—and to each other. As dedicated Company Sponsors for over a decade, Jan and Maria established four generous funds:

- The Conductors Fund: Ensuring the continued presence of esteemed conductors on the podium.
- The Great Interpreters of Italian Opera Fund: Supporting performances by today's most compelling artists in the Italian repertoire.
- The Emerging Stars Fund: Showcasing promising young talents on the San Francisco Opera stage throughout the season.

- The Luminaries Concert Fund: Bringing legendary artists to the stage for special events and performances.

In December 2022, Maria was honored with The Spirit of the Opera award in recognition of her unwavering dedication to San Francisco Opera, her leadership in advancing its success, and her commitment to the art form. In 2023, she received the prestigious UC Davis Medal, an honorary degree, for her profound impact on the arts and her dedication to fostering education and exploration.

Maria made history in April 2024 by establishing eight endowed funds in perpetuity at the UC Davis College of Letters and Science—the most significant gift in its history. In January 2025, her transformative philanthropy inaugurated the Maria Manetti Shrem Art District / Arts Renaissance. Her generosity will benefit over 35,000 students annually, supporting top faculty, emerging talents, and world-renowned artists.

Through her visionary leadership, Maria continues to shape the cultural landscape and enrich lives worldwide.

In September 2024, we mourned the peaceful passing of Jan Shrem at 94, who was honored with a memorial short film at the Manetti Shrem Museum in January 2025. We celebrate his extraordinary legacy and stand in deep sympathy with Maria during this time of loss.

Donor Spotlight



Diane B. Wilsey (Opening Weekend Grand Sponsor)

Dede Wilsey, a longtime San Francisco Opera board member, patron, and Opera Ball opening weekend supporter, believes deeply in the transformative power of the arts, particularly the multi-faceted world of opera. Says Dede, “It’s a marvelous spectacle. From the voices and pageantry to the scenery, costumes, and acting, opera fills the senses and takes you to another place.” Thanks to Dede’s generosity, opera enthusiasts of all ages have much to celebrate. As Opening Weekend Grand Sponsor for the sixteenth consecutive year, she is excited to celebrate the start of our season with the opening performance of *Rigoletto*. She is also supporting the celebratory floral arrangements that grace the War Memorial Opera House on September 5, and the free, annual *Opera in the Park* concert at Robin Williams

Meadow on September 7, and the opening production of Verdi’s *Rigoletto* under the baton of Eun Sun Kim. Dede’s leadership support was critical in the creation of the Diane B. Wilsey Center for Opera, a dynamic, intimate space at the Veterans Building, which opened in spring 2016. Her philanthropic commitment to the community extends to many organizations. Dede has been chairman of the board of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco since 1996 and serves on the boards of the San Francisco Opera, Ballet, and the War Memorial Performing Arts Center and is a lifetime trustee of UCSF.



DREW ALTIZER PHOTOGRAPHY

Jerome and Thao Dodson (Production Sponsor, *Rigoletto* and *Dead Man Walking*)

“A fiery horse with the speed of light, a cloud of dust, and a hearty, ‘Hi-Yo, Silver!’” Those words, accompanied by the galloping excitement of Rossini’s William Tell Overture, transfixed a young Jerry Dodson as he listened to *The Lone Ranger* on the family radio in Oak Park, Illinois. Just as Bugs Bunny’s *Rabbit of Seville* had done for many, a lighthearted entertainment sparked a future operatic devotion.

That little boy grew up to attend Berkeley in the ‘60s, serve with the American Embassy in Vietnam where he and Thao met, and attend Harvard Business School. Eventually, the couple married, settled in the Bay Area, and raised a family. In the 1980s, Jerry was a pioneer in the field of socially responsible investing with little interest in opera. But in 1992, when San Francisco Opera decided to celebrate Rossini’s bicentennial with the rarely performed

Guillaume Tell, Thao, already an opera lover, suggested to Jerry that they go.

Tell was praised for its striking Mansouri production, and the Dodsons began attending regularly. They became season ticket holders in 1999 and supporters, “in a small way,” as Jerry puts it. A friendship with David Gockley, which endures to this day, led to a larger role as Company Sponsors. “I so admired what he did for the opera, but it was not very good for my pocketbook,” Jerry laughs. Jerry also lends his financial expertise to the audit committee.

In 2016, Dodson considered the import of Gockley’s departure. He met with Matthew Shilvock and joined the Board that year. “We hit it off right away!” Jerry says. He felt a similar affinity with Keith Geeslin, then President of the San Francisco Opera Association. Eager to continue support, the Dodsons see this as a perfect time to revitalize and energize the Company within the San Francisco community. The initial fire ignited by *William Tell* continues to burn brightly.



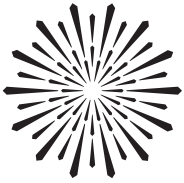
TERESA CONCEPCION

Barbara Ward (Production Sponsor, *Rigoletto*)

Barbara Ward has served on the San Francisco Opera Board of Directors since 1969 and is the longest current serving member. A dedicated patron of San Francisco Opera for over sixty years, she is also a member of the Producers Circle and the Bel Canto Society; supported the creation of the Diane B. Wilsey Center for Opera in which the Barbara Moller Ward Lobby in honor of David Gockley is located; and has sponsored several Adler Fellows throughout the years, including Nadine Sierra, Hadleigh Adams, and Aria Umezawa. In 1969 at the request of Kurt Herbert Adler for wider support, Barbara founded the Marin Chapter of San Francisco Opera Action which presented previews of upcoming opera performances. Opera Action was ultimately absorbed into the San Francisco Opera Guild, where the tradition of opera previews carries on today. Barbara continues to share the joy

of opera with her community, including arranging group performances to the Opera House for her fellow Tamalpais residents. Barbara is also an active and long-time supporter of several civic and charitable organizations in Marin County.

Donor Spotlight



**SAN FRANCISCO
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San Francisco Opera Guild (Production Sponsor, *Rigoletto*)

Now celebrating its 84th Anniversary, San Francisco Opera Guild delivers a full menu of education programs for Bay Area TK–12 students, teachers, adults, and the extended community. Each year over 64,000 students participate in award-winning programs including Sing a Story, Opera à la Carte, Book to Bravo!, Voices for Social Justice, Songs of the Season, and Student Dress Rehearsals through their schools. Young artists seeking more in-depth involvement join the youth training programs Summer Conservatory, Madrigals, and Opera Scouts for ages 7–18, and the youngest audiences enjoy special family programming like *Lucinda y las Flores de la Nochebuena*, playing each holiday season. With a particular focus on social-emotional skill building, the Guild believes the life lessons drawn from creative expression are the foundation of confidence, integrity, and compassion. San Francisco Opera Guild's Education Fund ensures the continuation of these vital programs. San Francisco Opera Guild is a proud supporter of San Francisco Opera and a Production Sponsor of *Rigoletto*. Giving Voice to Potential since 1939.



DREW ALTIZER PHOTOGRAPHY

Edmund W. and Jeannik Méquet Littlefield Fund (Production Sponsor, *Rigoletto*)

Company sponsors since 2002, the Littlefield name became especially familiar to opera fans in 2006 when Jeannik Littlefield made her historic \$35 million commitment to San Francisco Opera. Mrs. Littlefield held a subscription for more than 40 years until her passing in 2013. Her daughter, Denise Sobel, continues her family's wonderful legacy of support of San Francisco Opera. The Littlefield Family received the San Francisco Opera Guild's 2021 Crescendo Award, alongside the announcement of Sobel's leadership support of San Francisco Opera's Department of Diversity, Equity, and Community. The Edmund W. and Jeannik Méquet Littlefield Endowment Fund provides a permanent and unrestricted source of income for the Company.



DREW ALTIZER PHOTOGRAPHY

Denise Littlefield Sobel (Production Sponsor, *Dead Man Walking*)

Denise Littlefield Sobel is a philanthropist with a longstanding commitment to the visual and performing arts. She is at the forefront of several initiatives to promote diversity within the arts, including at San Francisco Opera. Denise serves on numerous diversity committees for other nonprofit organizations. When the Company commissioned its first opera in Spanish, *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*, Denise made Spanish supertitles available for the first time. She also sponsored San Francisco Opera's very first *Pride Concert*. Denise supports a variety of cultural institutions around the world, including the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, MA, where she currently serves as the Chair of the Board of Trustees, the first woman to do so. In 2019, the French government presented Denise with the country's highest civilian honor, naming her a Chevalier of the Légion

d'honneur in recognition of her extraordinary contributions to French culture. In 2023, she was also appointed Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters.

Donor Spotlight



Dianne and Tad Taube (Production Sponsor, *Rigoletto* and *Dead Man Walking*)

For more than 30 years, Dianne and Tad Taube have been catalysts for growth and innovation at San Francisco Opera. Their relationship with the Company dates back to 1991, and since then, they have played an instrumental role in shaping its future through their visionary support and generous contributions.

The Taubes' impact can be seen in numerous facets of the organization. Their major funding of the Dianne and Tad Taube Atrium Theater has created a space for dynamic performances, while their support of the General Director's position, named in their honor, underscores their commitment to leadership and excellence at the highest levels. They also have been pivotal in advancing the

Company's reach and influence through media, providing lead funding for the groundbreaking Taube Media Suite and supporting the renowned *Opera at the Ballpark* simulcasts, which have been instrumental in transforming the Company's impact in the wider community.

"As ongoing company sponsors, Dianne and Tad Taube exemplify the very spirit of philanthropy, inspiring others to give with the same generosity and vision," says Matthew Shilvock, the Tad and Dianne Taube General Director.

The Taubes' dedication goes beyond financial support. Dianne has served on the San Francisco Opera Board of Directors for over 20 years, contributing her expertise and leadership to the organization's long-term success. Together, Dianne and Tad have sponsored more than 10 productions, helping to bring both classic and contemporary works to life.

"Our many years of involvement with San Francisco Opera are an investment in the cultural life of our community," notes Dianne Taube. "It is an honor to help the Opera evolve. We are especially proud that our matching gifts in recent years help the Opera carry out its vision to bring this beautiful art form to people all over the Bay Area and beyond.



DREW ALTIZER PHOTOGRAPHY

Bernard & Barbro Osher (Production Sponsor, *Dead Man Walking*)

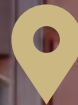
A native of Maine, Bernard Osher became involved with San Francisco Opera as a subscriber over 50 years ago, shortly after moving here from New York. He and his wife, Barbro, a native of Sweden, have supported every aspect of the Company's work, from artist appearances to production facilities to audience building programs. Established in 1977, The Bernard Osher Foundation has funded virtually every major arts organization in the area, including youth programs. Higher education initiatives include scholarships for community college students in California and Maine and for baccalaureate students at universities in every state and the District of Columbia; Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes, serving adults on 125 campuses nationwide; and Osher Centers for Integrative Health at 10 of the nation's leading medical schools and at the Karolinska Institute in

Stockholm, Sweden. Bernard is a longstanding member of the Opera's Board of Directors, serving on the Chairman's Council. Barbro served for many years as Consul General of Sweden for California and serves as Chairman of the Board of the Osher Foundation. Together they recently established the Osher Audience of the Future Fund, which gives San Francisco Opera an incredible resource to connect art and audiences together in new ways, ensuring that the Osher Theatre (the War Memorial auditorium) remains a vibrant, energized, and full-to-the-rafters building in which to experience transformational opera. This year, Bernard and Barbro were inducted into the OPERA America Hall of Fame, recognizing individuals who have made exceptional contributions to the opera field.

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Dead Man Walking

**OPERA IN TWO ACTS BY JAKE HEGGIE AND TERENCE MCNALLY
BASED ON THE BOOK BY SISTER HELEN PREJEAN, CSJ**

This production is made possible, in part, by
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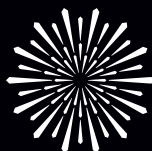
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Commissioned by San Francisco Opera
World premiere performance: October 7, 2000

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SEPTEMBER 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 28, 2025



**SAN FRANCISCO
OPERA**

Dead Man Walking

PROLOGUE

The brothers Joseph and Anthony De Rocher brutally murder two teenagers on a date.

ACT I

In a poor New Orleans school, Sister Helen and Sister Rose teach the children a hymn. Helen is preoccupied about her promise (against Rose's advice) to meet in person with her correspondent Joseph De Rocher, a death row inmate. On the long drive to Angola State Penitentiary, she ponders the momentous step she is taking. Stopped for speeding but let off with a warning, she prays for guidance as she resumes her journey.

The prison chaplain Father Grenville arrogantly warns her that she is wasting her time, as Joseph is beyond help. The warden predicts that Joseph will ask her for spiritual help to prepare for execution. Walking through death row, Helen is taunted by the inmates.

Joseph and Helen have an awkward first meeting. Hiding his fear with bravado, he tests her tolerance by recalling the pleasures he has known with women. She calls his bluff, and Joseph admits his fear, asking her to be his spiritual advisor and to accompany his mother to the Pardon Board hearing.

In a courtroom setting, the frightened Mrs. De Rocher pleads for her son's life. Owen Hart, father of the slain girl, furiously recounts the grisly details of her murder. In anguish, Joseph's mother can only respond that another killing cannot undo what has been done.

Joseph's family and the murder victims' families wait for a verdict outside the courtroom. Helen introduces herself to the parents, and they express their grief at never seeing their children again. News arrives that the appeal has been turned down: Joseph will be executed.

Helen tells Joseph that an appeal has been made to the governor. She urges him to acknowledge his guilt and seek forgiveness, but he blames his brother for the murders. The warden appears suddenly and insists she leave. Helen has had no time to eat and becomes faint from hunger, stress, and exhaustion. As she looks for change at a vending machine, a jumble of conflicting voices thunders in her mind. The warden tells her the governor has turned down the appeal: "Joseph De Rocher is a dead man." The voices in her head grow louder, and Helen faints.

ACT II

Joseph is counting pushups when the warden comes to tell him his execution date has been set for August 4, at midnight. Joseph voices feelings about his impending death, Sister Helen, and his murder victims.

Helen awakens from a nightmare about Joseph and the murdered teenagers. Rose comforts her and helps her admit she still must find the strength to forgive Joseph herself.

On the night of Joseph's execution, Helen tells him about seeing Elvis Presley in person when she was a girl. Their shared love for Elvis opens an emotional door between them. She once more urges Joseph to admit his guilt and find forgiveness.

In a tearful farewell with his mother and two younger brothers, Joseph begs his mother to forgive him. Still believing in his innocence, she replies that there is nothing to forgive and finds comfort in recollections of Joseph's carefree boyhood. But when he is led away, his mother falls apart, consoled by Helen with assurances that there is good in her son and that God's love is not denied him. Left alone, Helen panics for a moment as she contemplates the harrowing task she faces that night.

The parents of the murder victims upbraid Helen for siding with the murderer, rejecting her words of consolation. Only Owen Hart, father of the murdered girl, expresses doubts about the value of the execution. Helen offers him friendship and promises to visit.

Alone with Joseph one last time, Helen begs him to tell the truth, revealing that she visited the crime scene. Joseph reluctantly tells her the whole story, breaking down in sobs and admits his guilt. Helen assures him of forgiveness—hers and God's. She will be there, the face of love for him, when he dies.

The warden calls out, "Dead man walking." Father Grenville intones the Lord's Prayer, echoed by those all around. Allowed to touch him this one time, Helen puts her hand reassuringly on his back, but when they reach the death chamber, she is barred from going farther, and they exchange emotional good-byes. Strapped to the execution table, Joseph asks for the parents' forgiveness. In silence, with only his heartbeat audible, the lethal injection is administered. In his final moment, Joseph says to Sister Helen: "I love you." After the witnesses leave and Helen is alone with Joseph, she sings her hymn one last time: "He will gather us around."

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TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23 • 7:30 PM
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26 • 7:30 PM
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 28 • 2 PM

Dead Man Walking

Opera in two acts by **Jake Heggie** • Libretto by **Terrence McNally**
Based on the book by **Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ**

(Sung in English with English supertitles)

CAST

(in order of appearance)

<i>Teenage Boy</i>	Chris Costanz*
<i>Teenage Girl</i>	Anna Kosiarek*
<i>Joseph De Rocher</i>	Ryan McKinny
<i>Anthony De Rocher, Joseph's brother</i>	Zachary Cowan*
<i>Sister Helen Prejean</i>	Jamie Barton
<i>Sister Rose</i>	Brittany Renee
<i>First Mother</i>	Sally Mouzon
<i>Sister Lillianne</i>	Whitney Steele
<i>Sister Catherine</i>	Danielle Cheiken*
<i>Jimmy Charlton</i>	Logan Cook*
<i>Mrs. Charlton</i>	Liesl McPherrin
<i>Motorcycle Cop</i>	Olivier Zerouali†
<i>Father Grenville, the prison chaplain</i>	Chad Shelton
<i>George Benton, the prison warden</i>	Raymond Aceto
<i>First prison guard</i>	Samuel Kidd†
<i>Second prison guard</i>	Philip Skinner
<i>First inmate</i>	Kevin Gino
<i>Second inmate</i>	William Lee Bryan
<i>Third inmate</i>	Chester Pidduck
<i>Fourth inmate</i>	John Fulton
<i>Fifth inmate</i>	Nikolas Nackley
<i>Paralegal</i>	Mary Hoskins†
<i>Mrs. Patrick De Rocher, Joseph's mother</i>	Susan Graham
<i>Older Brother to Joseph</i>	Ryan Torres*
<i>Younger Brother to Joseph</i>	Jackson Horton*
<i>Owen Hart, father of the murdered girl</i>	Rod Gilfry
<i>Kitty Hart, mother of the murdered girl</i>	Caroline Corrales†
<i>Jade Boucher, mother of the murdered boy</i>	Nikola Printz
<i>Howard Boucher, father of the murdered boy</i>	Samuel White†
<i>Schoolchildren, mothers, prison inmates, lawyers, prison guards</i>	

* San Francisco Opera debut † Current Adler Fellow

PLACE AND TIME: Louisiana in the early 1980s

PROLOGUE

ACT I

—INTERMISSION—

ACT II

*The performance will last approximately two hours and fifty-two minutes with one intermission.
Latecomers may not be seated during the performance after the lights have dimmed.
Patrons who leave during the performance may not be reseated until intermission.
The use of cameras, cell phones, and any kind of recording equipment
is strictly forbidden during the performance. Please turn off and refrain from using all electronic devices.*

What is Our Capacity for Forgiveness?



Dead Man Walking, production by Leonard Foglia. / ANDREW CIOFFI/LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO

I am confronted with this question every time I return to *Dead Man Walking*. This piece can be viewed (usually by people who have never seen the opera) as a referendum on the death penalty in the United States. I find that lets everyone off the hook far too easily. Generally people's views on capital punishment are fixed: you are either for it or against it, end of discussion.

What, I believe, this piece really asks the audience is something far more difficult. Would you have the capacity to forgive someone who perpetrated a horrible crime, such as the ones depicted in this piece, against a loved one?

I find myself very low on the forgiveness scale, something of which I am not proud. When I am confronted with the question of, could I forgive, I don't honestly know the answer. Each time I work on *Dead Man Walking*, I carefully chart Sister Helen's journey, step by step, and I am constantly surprised when I reach the moment that she cannot answer the question, as to whether she has forgiven the killer. Her faith is based on



AMY WAGNER

being able to see the face of God in each and every person. What if she finds she is unable see it in this man? Or forgive him?

The centerpiece of the first act is an aria, sung by Sister Helen as she travels to the prison for the first time to meet the murderer, Joseph De Rocher.

This journey.
This journey to Christ.
This journey to my God.
This journey to myself.
To my Jesus.
To this man.
This journey.
This journey to the truth.
This journey.

Sister Helen's journey is our journey, our journey to the truth, the truth about ourselves. ❁

Gathering Us Around

DEAD MAN WALKING A QUARTER CENTURY LATER

BY PATRICK SUMMERS

Someone mentioned to me recently that the success of the opera *Dead Man Walking* came out of nowhere. I chuckled. Did we know at the time that we were involved in something special? It would make a cleaner story to say we did, but we didn't. We knew that an epic group of people had assembled: Susan Graham, Flicka (Frederica von Stade), Kristine Jepson, Bob Orth, John Packard, Joe Mantello, Michael Yeargan ... so many, all united by a deep belief in Jake Heggie whose assigned task was a formidable one. Did we *know* it would work? No.

Sister Helen Prejean famously opened her 1993 book, *Dead Man Walking*, with these words:

I've heard that there are two situations that make interesting stories; when an extraordinary person is plunged into the commonplace and when an ordinary person gets involved in extraordinary events.

Jake Heggie, uniquely, is both of these scenarios at once. On the extraordinary side he is a gifted composer and creator, an empath, a collaborator, a storyteller, an activist, and a champion of those he respects, starting with the audience. But he is also that "ordinary" person to whom anyone can relate: a homebody, loving husband, quick to laugh, thoughtful, and generous. If you are a friend of Jake's, you will never know a better friend. This isn't at all *ordinary* in life, but he would describe it as such, so we have to take his word. And another thing for the "ordinary" column: Jake didn't know if he could create a work like *Dead Man Walking*. Indeed, when he told his mom—beloved Judy—that San Francisco Opera was asking him to



compose an opera, she said, "Can you *do* that?"

The one person who did know was Lotfi Mansouri (San Francisco Opera's General Director 1988–2001), who took a huge risk with this opera that he didn't have to take, and no one talked him into it. Lore has taken over much of this story—as it always does—but my recollection was this: I was involved in the development of André Previn's opera *A Streetcar Named Desire*, conducting half of the performances with André in 1998. In an early meeting about *Streetcar* and

various other projects, Lotfi casually mentioned to me how happy he was that André had finally agreed to compose *Streetcar*, fulfilling Lotfi's lifelong dream for an opera on the epic Tennessee Williams play, and "wouldn't it be wonderful after *Streetcar* to have an unknown composer and an unexpected subject for the millennium?"

It was during that meeting that I mentioned Jake as a possible composer. No one could portray incredulity quite like Lotfi, and at that moment I got *the look*. "Yes," I said to his doubting face, "*that* Jake."

I don't believe I was the first person to mention Jake's compositions to Lotfi, but he acted like I was. I told him to speak to Flicka, Bryn Terfel, Renée Fleming—the singers who were already championing Jake's songs by that time—and he did. Jake had started working in the San Francisco Opera press office in April 1994, and within a few short years he was the Company's composer-in-residence with a commission for an opera to premiere in the 2000 fall season. This was classic Lotfi and right out of one of the Hollywood movies that he loved. Lotfi was a believer and a risk-taker. Once he had an idea, which he certainly had with Jake, he would never let go of it, and he always had the courage to be wrong, which is a wonderful quality in a



San Francisco Opera General Director Lotfi Mansouri and composer Jake Heggie on opening night in 2000.

JANNA WALDINGER



Conductor Patrick Summers (center) with *Dead Man Walking* composer Jake Heggie and librettist Terrence McNally after the workshop in 1999.

COURTESY OF JAKE HEGGIE

leader. With Jake and *Dead Man Walking*, Lotfi turned out not only to be right, but he was ahead of his time. Unfortunately, he wouldn't live to see the full impact this opera would have.

Speaking of movies, Lotfi's original ask of Jake was for a comic ensemble opera in French based on the 1934 film *La Belle de Nuit* about a man who seeks vengeance on his cheating girlfriend by hiring a prostitute who resembles her (but it's a *comedy*!). Obviously (perhaps thankfully), the French comic opera never happened. It was Lotfi's brilliant idea to bring on Terrence McNally as the experienced hand to develop the idea and write a libretto for the inexperienced Jake. It took some convincing for Terrence to agree, but once he did, he was a force and became the theatrical granddad of all of us.

We are too quick to forget how much contemporary opera Lotfi programmed during his tenure in San Francisco. One of his earliest programmed works was Philip Glass' *Satyagraha*, and the Company was among the consortium who commissioned the 1991 John Adams opera, *The Death of Klinghoffer*. There were also wonderful performances of Hans Werner Henze's *Das Verratene Meer*, and Stewart Wallace's *Harvey Milk* played to admiring crowds more than a decade before Sean Penn played San Francisco's famous civil rights leader in the 2008 film *Milk*.

It was Conrad Susa's 1994 commission, *The Dangerous Liaisons*, that was a turning point on many fronts, including for Jake. While obviously based on the 1782 novel, it was really commissioned because Lotfi loved the glittering 1988 Stephen Frears film of the same name. How vividly I remember everyone gathering backstage at every performance just to

hear Renée Fleming sing the most perfect high B-natural in the western world with "Valmont is dead!" *The Dangerous Liaisons* was a hit with the San Francisco public, and it gave Lotfi new life to find his composer for *Streetcar*, which in turn gave him the courage for *Dead Man Walking*.

Looking back, there were reactions to *Dead Man Walking* that appear retrospectively quaint. There was a visceral reaction to creating operas out of popular film titles, though for Jake that was an illogical, non-historical argument. The fact that *Dead Man Walking* had been an acclaimed 1995 film for which Susan Sarandon won an Academy Award for Best Actress, was no detriment to an opera only a few years later. Indeed, telling a story for which the audience already had a nodal point was highly desirable to both Jake and Terrence.

The year 2000 (remember "Y2K?") was a big year for new operas besides *Dead Man Walking*. That spring, I conducted Carlisle Floyd's delightful and moving *Cold Sassy Tree* in Houston, and I recorded Mark Adamo's *Little Women* with Joyce DiDonato. 2000 also brought Kaija Saariaho and Amin Maalouf's *L'Amour de Loin* in Salzburg, Michael Nyman's gorgeous *Facing Goya*, Poul Ruders' searing *The Handmaid's Tale* (performed last season by San Francisco Opera), Michael Berkeley's beautiful opera on *Jane Eyre*, and Adams' *El Niño* in Paris.

But a bigger trend was emerging: 21st-century opera was becoming an American art. Since 2000, more than 300 new operas have been created in the United States, a pace of creation not seen since the years between Wagner's *Parsifal* and WWI. Viewed through opera's meta-history, opera began as a remnant of the Florentine



The starry October 7, 2000 world premiere of *Dead Man Walking* drew many celebrities to the War Memorial Opera House, including (left to right) Garry Marshall, Julie Andrews, Robin Williams, Susan Sarandon, Woody Harrelson, Sean Penn, and Tim Robbins.

COURTESY OF JAKE HEGGIE

and Venetian empires in the 16th century, spread across Europe and flourished through the early-20th-century world wars, and immigrated, creatively-speaking, to America. Yes, opera is an immigrant to our shores, as are many things, from our constitutional republic to every imaginable culinary delight.

American Opera in the immediate post-WWII years was a lean field, led by Carlisle Floyd, Gian Carlo Menotti, Robert Ward, Samuel Barber, and Leonard Bernstein in their various ways though never quite finding a broad public. Europe was scarcely more robust in those years, Benjamin Britten and Francis Poulenc notwithstanding. But the American Musical during the same time was incredibly robust, holding within it the Rodgers and Hammerstein revolution, which was considered both of high quality and of high artistic risk in its day, Lerner and Loewe, Bernstein (he always straddled all creative worlds), Jule Styne, and the complete 1970s reordering of the American Musical by Oscar Hammerstein II's mentee, Stephen Sondheim.

Fast-forward to *Dead Man Walking* and the last 25 years, and those worlds have reversed themselves. Newly created musicals are rare, while only a generation ago there was a *Hamilton*-level hit musical nearly every season. Now, if you're seeking innovative musical storytelling, you'll find it not in the commercial theater but in the opera house. There are more living composers today who have heard their own operas performed than has happened since Puccini's era.

Jake Heggie is a composer in opera's grand tradition—big, symphonic, choral, expansive—and his musical language brings that past together with a post-Sondheim

kind of songwriting. He loves the expressive possibilities of the human voice, a quality he shares with the greatest of the legacy opera composers, but he has also always had his own voice—you can hear it from the first moments in *Dead Man Walking*.

Opening night of *Dead Man Walking* feels like it just happened, so the "25th Anniversary" this season is surreal for many of us. How deeply I recall everyone looking for Sister Helen that night as we neared curtain time. She was nowhere to be found, until someone thought to look out on Van Ness Avenue, where she was peacefully talking and praying with a group of pro-death penalty protesters. That night was also attended by Susan Sarandon, Tim Robbins, Sean Penn, and Julie Andrews, who happened to be in town filming Disney's *The Princess Diaries*. Joshua Kosman delightfully wrote later in the *San Francisco Chronicle* that Andrews was there "representing singing nuns everywhere."

The very first person I saw when we walked offstage from the opening night curtain call was a beloved Hollywood actor who had somehow watched the final scene from the wings. I had never met him before, but we were introduced, and he fell into my arms, sobbing. "Oh, Patrick, that is one of the most moving things I've ever experienced." Did we all know that Jake had created something special? In that moment, the late Robin Williams gave me the answer 🌟

Patrick Summers is Artistic and Music Director of Houston Grand Opera and was formerly San Francisco Opera's Principal Guest Conductor. Among his more than 40 productions with San Francisco Opera, Maestro Summers led the world premiere of Dead Man Walking in 2000.

THE JOURNEY OF Sister Helen Prejean

BY ELENA PARK



SCOTT LANGLEY

Sister Helen Prejean credits “sneaky Jesus” for the awakening that sparked her lifelong ministry: to serve as a spiritual advisor to individuals on death row, counsel the families of victims and the incarcerated, and to passionately campaign to abolish the death penalty. What began in 1982 as a correspondence with Patrick Sonnier, who had been sentenced to death for the murder of two teenagers, led to her witnessing his execution two years later. This journey is chronicled in the *New York Times* best-seller, *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*, bringing this “secret” process firmly into public consciousness—inspiring not only the Academy Award-winning film starring Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn (1995) and stage adaptation (2003), but also the groundbreaking opera (2000).

Speaking from her home office in New Orleans, the tireless advocate, now 86 years old, reflects on the powerful legacy of her memoir, the state of the death penalty in the United States, and the nature of heaviness and hope—and how social change only happens when we take collective action to catch the wave.

With adaptations in film, stage, and opera—and soon, a graphic novel version—it’s incredible to see the enduring force of your memoir, 32 years after its publication.

Tim [Robbins, who directed the film] kept saying, “The nun is in over her head.” I didn’t know anything about the criminal justice system, I waited too long to reach out to the victims—I

didn’t know what to do with them, they were in such pain. I got thrown into this, made some mistakes along the way, but found my way. That’s why I love the aria [“This journey” from Act I]. It’s my journey, and the audience is coming with me.

The sobering part of this for me is I’ve accompanied eight human beings that have been [on death row]; they were killed in front of my eyes, and that keeps me focused and sober. I never completely lose myself: I’ve been through the heart of the real thing. We’ve executed more than 1,600 people. We’ve gassed them and shot them and lethally injected and electrocuted them, and nobody sees it. It’s the few witnesses behind prison walls. And there’s no doubt there’s a connection between transforming public consciousness and conscience, and being able to repeal [the death penalty].

Tell me about working with Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally.

Right away I knew I could trust Jake because he had such a heart. I loved it that Terrence has the murder as the prologue, and everybody sees the two kids being killed. It saves moral energy from people going, “Did he do it or not?” You’ve got to bring the people on the whole journey from the horror of the crime, acknowledging his guilt, and seeing that he’s not remorseful.

There was a special moment when Jake called me and said, “Helen, I think I have the heart of the opera.” And it was the [Act II] sextet where the victim’s family is singing, and the mother of Joseph De Rocher is singing, and he’s

plinking it on the piano and trying to sing it for me so I can get a sense of it. In the scene, I'm in the middle going from one to the other, and what am I saying? *I'm sorry. I'm sorry.*

And I *was* sorry because I had done it very badly. Terrence brought out the mother of Joseph De Rocher and her own suffering—Flicka [Frederica von Stadel] performed that role at the premiere. And it takes me back to the real pain, like the mothers who have a son who's done a terrible crime.

What's the current state of the death penalty abolition movement?

The system's just so corrupted; what happens to human beings who don't have power and means to get a high-powered lawyer? That's why you never see rich people go because they get a high-powered attorney and the district attorney can think 50, 100 times before they take them on and try to go after the death penalty.

of times, I can't do anything. And then it's this thing of, how are we going to get to the American people?

I don't know if I'd use the word optimism for me, but I do use the word hope. And what I've discovered is when you're doing something, when you're engaged in the current, then the hope flows through you. But if you're standing on the side just watching it ... That's true, I think, for what's going on in our country now: people are just standing on the bank saying, "What's happening to immigrants, isn't this horrible?" And not being engaged. So that's the magic of what we hope for with the opera and the events surrounding it, of connecting the activists with art.

[Referring to a painting of an ocean wave on the interviewer's wall] I love that motion of the water. I didn't do any serious surfing, it was just a little tummy board. I describe it in my book, *A River of Fire*, that even in the modified form like that if you go ahead of the wave, you end too quickly. If you miss the momentum, it leaves you

“The magic of what we hope for with the opera and the events surrounding it [is] connecting the activists with art.”

It's interesting what's going on in California, because California, by and large, is a progressive state, and Gavin Newsom has shut down the death penalty. People need to get behind the initiative to repeal the daggone thing. There have been these shifts; now, state after state after state is shutting it down. Where is it happening still? In the ex-slave states, pockets of death that are going on are Alabama, Louisiana ... It's very much a legacy of slavery to have people whose bodies you control, whose lives you control, that you can even kill them. We're in the last vestiges of this thing, kind of like a war is ending, but if you get killed on the second day before the armistice, you're still dead.

I so admire your energy and optimism. Does the burden ever feel heavy to you? How do you recharge?

I almost always begin the day heavy like, *Oh, what do I need to do?* And then the calls come. Sometimes it's a mother who has that child on death row and he's innocent. "What can I do? How can I get a lawyer?" It's overwhelming; a lot

behind. But if you catch it, it's going to take you roaring all the way into the beach. I've experienced that a couple of times. So to me, it's to get on the wave.

To mark San Francisco Opera's 25th anniversary of Dead Man Walking, Sister Helen Prejean was featured in free public programs including Faith, Law, and the Death Penalty on September 10 at the Sydney Goldstein Theater (presented with Ministry Against the Death Penalty and the San Francisco Interfaith Council) and An Afternoon with Sister Helen Prejean on September 12 at the San Francisco Public Library's Koret Auditorium. To learn more about the new graphic edition of Dead Man Walking, please visit sisterhelen.org/books/. 🌻

Filmmaker Elena Park earned her second Emmy directing nomination for Eun Sun Kim: A Journey Into Lohengrin, the acclaimed San Francisco Opera/Lumai Productions documentary. This fall, she continues as Executive Producer of both the Met's Saturday radio broadcasts and The Cleveland Orchestra's In Focus programs, as well as Curator of National Sawdust+.

Artist Profiles

* San Francisco Opera Debut ♪ Role Debut † Current Adler Fellow ♦ Adler Fellowship Graduate + Merola Opera Program Graduate



JAKE HEGGIE

(Bexley, Ohio)

Composer

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: *Dead Man Walking*; *Moby-Dick*; *Three Decembers*;

It's A Wonderful Life

Recent and Upcoming: *Dead Man Walking* (Freeze Frame Opera, University of Colorado Boulder, English National Opera); *Intelligence* (Virginia Opera); "Fire" for *The Elements* (Houston Symphony, Naples Philharmonic, Ottawa's National Arts Centre Orchestra); *Songs for Murdered Sisters*; *Oh Children*; *Crossing Borders*; *Earth 2.0*; *What I Miss the Most*
Composer of 10 full-length operas and numerous one-acts; more than 300 art songs, as well as concerti, chamber music, choral, and orchestral works
Diane B. Wilsey Distinguished Professor of Composition at San Francisco Conservatory of Music
@jakeheggieusic



TERRENCE

MCNALLY

(1938–2020)

(Corpus Christi, Texas)

Librettist

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: *Dead Man Walking*

Career Highlights: Playwright, librettist, and LGBTQ+ trailblazer for six decades
Tony Awards for *Love! Valour!* *Compassion!*, *Master Class*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *Ragtime*, Lifetime Achievement
Emmy Award for *Andre's Mother*



PATRICK SUMMERS+

(Loogootee, Indiana)

Conductor

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally's *Dead Man*

Walking; André Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire*; *Il Trittico*; Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *Moby-Dick*; *Sweeney Todd*; *Guillaume Tell*

Recent and Upcoming: *Il Trittico* (Houston Grand Opera); *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Houston); Handel's *Messiah* (Houston); Gregory Spears' *Fellow Travelers* (Seattle Opera); Handel's *Saul* (Houston); *Madama Butterfly* (Houston); Ethel Smyth's *The Wreckers* (Houston); Tarik O'Regan's *The Phoenix* (Houston); Joel Thompson's *The Snowy Day* (Houston)
San Francisco Opera Medal 2015
Former Principal Guest Conductor of San Francisco Opera
Artistic and Music Director of Houston Grand Opera
Co-Director of Aspen Opera Theater and Vocal Arts
Merola Opera Program: 1986, 1987



JAMIE BARTON

Mezzo-Soprano

(Rome, Georgia)

Sister Helen Prejean

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Adalgisa in *Norma*; Fricka in

Das Rheingold and *Die Walküre*; Waltraute and Second Norn in *Götterdämmerung*; Ježibaba in *Rusalka*; *In Song*: Jamie Barton film

Recent and Upcoming: Frugola, Zita, and the Princess in *Il Trittico* (Houston Grand Opera); Witch in *Hansel and Gretel* (Houston); Ježibaba in *Rusalka* (Munich's Bavarian State Opera, Paris Opera); concerts (Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, Houston Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra); recitals (Arizona Opera, Tucson Desert Song Festival); Elizabeth Van Lew in Jake Heggie's *Intelligence* (Houston); Mère Marie in *Dialogues des Carmelites* (Metropolitan Opera); Orfeo in *Orfeo ed Euridice* (Metropolitan Opera); Baba the Turk in *The Rake's Progress* (Paris); Leonor in *La Favorite* (Houston); Adalgisa in *Norma* (Houston); Fricka in the *Ring* cycle (Metropolitan Opera); Eboli in *Don Carlo* (Washington National Opera, Metropolitan Opera); Amneris in *Aida* (Lyric Opera of Chicago, Madrid's Teatro Real); Brangäne in *Tristan und Isolde* (Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Munich, Santa Fe Opera); Julia Child in Lee Hoiby's *Bon Appétit!* (Houston); Nettie Fowler in *Carousel* (Boston Lyric Opera); title role in a queer *Carmen* (Chicago Opera Theater); Sister Helen Prejean in Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally's *Dead Man Walking* (Atlanta Opera)

Beverly Sills Artist Award: 2017
Richard Tucker Award: 2015
Winner of Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions: 2007
Instagram: @jbartonmezzo
X: @jbartonmezzo

MANY THANKS TO

Bob Epstein & Amy Roth, supporting Susan Graham

ARTIST PROFILES CONTINUED



RYLAN MCKINNY

Bass-Baritone
(Los Angeles,
California)

Joseph De Rocher

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Clarence

in John Adams' *Girls of the Golden West*
Recent and Upcoming: Joseph De Rocher in Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking* (Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago); John Proctor in Robert Ward's *The Crucible* (Washington National Opera); Michele and Gianni Schicchi in *Il Trittico* (Houston Grand Opera); Lieutenant Horstmayer in Kevin Puts' *Silent Night* (Houston); title role of *Bluebeard's Castle* (Omaha Symphony and Opera Omaha); title role of *Don Giovanni* (Washington National Opera, Chicago, Houston); title role of *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Seattle Opera, Metropolitan Opera); Amfortas in *Parsifal* (Bayreuth); Kurwenal in *Tristan und Isolde* (Seattle); Scarpia in *Tosca* (LA Opera); Clarence in John Adams' *Girls of the Golden West* (LA Philharmonic, Amsterdam's Dutch National Opera); Jochanaan in *Salome* (Houston); Gerald "Mac" McDonald in Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *Before It All Goes Dark*
@ryanmckinny



SUSAN GRAHAM+

Mezzo-Soprano
(Roswell,
New Mexico)

Mrs. Patrick De Rocher

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Sister

Helen Prejean in Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally's *Dead Man Walking*; title role of *Iphigénie en Tauride*; Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier*; title roles of Ariodante and Xerxes; Didon in *Les Troyens*
Recent and Upcoming: Desiree Armfeldt in *A Little Night Music* (Orchestra of St. Luke's at Lincoln Center); The Marquise of Berkenfield in *La Fille du Régiment*

(Paris Opera); Baroness in *Vanessa* (National Symphony Orchestra); Richard Danielpour's *A Standing Witness* (Carnegie Hall); Mrs. Patrick De Rocher in *Dead Man Walking* (Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago); John Cage's *Europas 4* (Detroit Opera); Hanna Glawari in *The Merry Widow* (Dallas Symphony Orchestra); Geneviève in *Pelléas and Mélisande* (LA Opera, Santa Fe Opera); Mahler's Third Symphony (BBC Proms, Paris); Witch in *Hansel and Gretel* (LA); Berlioz's *Les Nuits d'Été* (Houston Symphony); Berlioz's *La Mort de Cléopâtre* (New Zealand Symphony) Grammy Award for Best Classical Vocal Performance (*Ives: Songs*) Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur Merola Opera Program: 1987 Website: susangraham.com Facebook: @MezzoGraham X: @MezzoGraham Instagram: @mezzsue



BRITTANY RENEE

Soprano
(Bronx, New York)

Sister Rose

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Julie in Rhiannon Giddens

and Michael Abels' *Omar*; Musetta in *La Bohème*
Recent and Upcoming: Musetta in *La Bohème* (Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis); Bess in *Porgy and Bess* (Kennedy Center, Metropolitan Opera, Turin's Teatro Regio); Esther in Paula Prestini's *Silent Light* (National Sawdust); Brahms Requiem (New York Philharmonic); Paul Moravec and Mark Campbell's *Sanctuary Road* (Buffalo Philharmonic); Laura Bolton's *Voxspex*; gala concert in memory of John Paul II (Merkin Hall); Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* (Florentine Opera); Destiny/Loneliness/Greta in Terence Blanchard and Kasi Lemmons' *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (Metropolitan Opera, Lyric

Opera of Chicago); Evelyn in *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (Metropolitan Opera); Annie in *Porgy and Bess* (Metropolitan Opera); Sadie Griffith in Blanchard's *Champion* (Metropolitan Opera); Giannetta in *L'Elisir d'Amore* (Metropolitan Opera); Ancella in *Medea* (Metropolitan Opera); *Rigoletto* (Metropolitan Opera); Micaëla in *Carmen* (Opera Orlando); Handel's *Messiah* (National Chorale); recital (Florentine Opera); vocals for Blanchard's score for *The Woman King* film



RAYMOND ACETO

Bass
(Cleveland, Ohio)

George Benton

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Fafner in *Das Rheingold*;

Hunding in *Die Walküre*
Recent and Upcoming: Bonze in *Madama Butterfly* (Metropolitan Opera); Nourabad in *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* (Metropolitan Opera); Méphistophélès in *Faust* (Washington National Opera); Sparafucile in *Rigoletto* (Dallas Opera); George Benton in Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally's *Dead Man Walking* (Metropolitan Opera); Marquis de la Force in *Dialogues of the Carmelites* (Dallas); Abimélech in *Samson et Dalila* (New Orleans Opera); Il Commendatore in *Don Giovanni* (Opera Philadelphia); Daland in *Der Fliegende Holländer* (Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra); Surin in *The Queen of Spades* (Metropolitan Opera); *Nabucco* (Shanghai Opera House); Hunding in *Die Walküre* (Seattle Opera, Atlanta Opera, Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra); Zuniga in *Carmen* (Metropolitan Opera); Oroveso in *Norma* (Greek National Opera); Captain in Daniel Catán's *Florencia en el Amazonas* (Lyric Opera of Chicago); Arkel in *Pelléas et Mélisande* (Santa Fe Opera); Friar Lawrence in *Roméo et Juliette* (Dallas); Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte* (Grand Teton Music Festival); Friar in *Don Carlo* (Dallas)

ARTIST PROFILES CONTINUED



CHAD SHELTON

Tenor
(Orange, Texas)

Father Grenville

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Brigadier General Edward

Alexander in Philip Glass' *Appomattox*
Recent and Upcoming: Kronprinz in Kevin Puts and Mark Campbell's *Silent Night* (Houston Grand Opera); Herod in *Salome* (Metropolitan Opera, Stuttgart Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Houston, Des Moines Metro Opera); Chekalinsky in *The Queen of Spades* (Metropolitan Opera); Eric in *Der Fliegende Holländer* (Santa Fe Opera, Opera Colorado); Chaplain in *Dialogues des Carmélites* (Houston); Witch of Endor in Handel's *Saul* (Houston); lead tenor roles of Tarik O'Regan's *The Phoenix*; Pollione in *Norma* (Houston, North Carolina Opera); Aegisth in *Elektra* (Houston); Charles II in Carlisle Floyd's *Price of Players* (Florentine Opera); Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* (Metropolitan Opera); Father Grenville in Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally's *Dead Man Walking* (Metropolitan Opera); Bob Boles in *Peter Grimes* (Metropolitan Opera); Third Player in Brett Dean's *Hamlet* (Metropolitan Opera); Loud Stone in Matthew Aucoin's *Eurydice* (Metropolitan Opera); Roderigo in *Otello* (Metropolitan Opera)



ROD GILFRAY

Baritone
(Covina, California)

Owen Hart

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Stanley Kowalski in André

Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire*; Mr. Potter in Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *It's a Wonderful Life*; Father-in-Law in Kaija Saariaho's *Innocence*
Recent and Upcoming: Walt Whitman in Matthew Aucoin's *Crossing* (LA Opera);

Eurydice's Father in Aucoin's *Eurydice* (LA); Alfred Stieglitz in Kevin Puts' *The Brightness of Light* (Nashville Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Toledo Symphony, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Lyric Opera of Chicago, LA); Claudius in Brett Dean's *Hamlet* (Metropolitan Opera, Munich's Bavarian State Opera, Glyndebourne Festival, Adelaide Festival, Opera Australia); David Lang's *the loser* (LA); Father-in-Law in Kaija Saariaho's *Innocence* (Metropolitan Opera); Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte* (Chicago, LA, Seiji Ozawa Music Academy, Dallas Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Korea National Opera); Owen Hart in Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally's *Dead Man Walking* (Metropolitan Opera); Robert McNamara in Huang Ruo and David Henry Hwang's *Written in Stone* (Washington National Opera); Scarpia in *Tosca* (Houston Grand Opera)



CAROLINE

CORRALES

Soprano
(St. Louis, Missouri)

Kitty Hart

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Moira in

Poul Ruders and Paul Bentley's *The Handmaid's Tale*; Mimi in *Bohème Out of the Box*; Countess Ceprano in *Rigoletto*
Recent and Upcoming: Sixth Flower Maiden in *Parsifal* (San Francisco Opera); Mimi in *La Bohème* (Opera Naples); Female Chorus in *The Rape of Lucretia* (Merola Opera Program); scenes as Amelia in *Simon Boccanegra* and Ellen Orford in *Peter Grimes* (Merola); Ma Zegner in Missy Mazzoli's *Proving Up* (Boston University Opera Institute); Anne Trulove in *The Rake's Progress* (Boston)
San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship Program: 2024, 2025
Merola Opera Program: 2023



SAMUEL WHITE

Tenor
(Columbia, South Carolina)

Howard Boucher

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: High

Priest of Neptune and Trojan #1 in *Idomeneo*; Rodolfo in *Bohème Out of the Box*; Matteo Borsa in *Rigoletto*
Recent and Upcoming: First Knight of the Grail in *Parsifal* (San Francisco Opera); Canio in *Pagliacci* (Wexford Festival Opera); Matthew Gurney in Tobias Picker's *Emmeline* (Manhattan School of Music); Bacchus in the final scene of *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Schwabacher Summer Concert); title role in an excerpt from *Werther* (Merola Grand Finale); scenes from *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and *Boris Godunov* (Santa Fe Opera)
San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship Program: 2025
Merola Opera Program: 2024



NIKOLA PRINTZ

Mezzo-Soprano
(Oakland, California)

Jade Boucher

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Title role of *Carmen Encounter*;

soloist in *Pride Concert*
Recent and Upcoming: Alto solo in *Parsifal* (San Francisco Opera); title role of *Carmen* (Festival Opera, Opera San José); "Casta Diva" on trapeze (Grange Festival); "Summer of Love" tour (Vermont Symphony Orchestra); Billie Jean King in Laura Karpman's *Balls* (London Philharmonic, Opera Parallèle); Berlioz's *Les Nuits d'Été* (Vallejo Symphony); Dido in *Dido and Aeneas* (San José); Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (San José); Manuel de Falla's *El Sombrero de Tres Picos* (San Francisco Symphony); *Das Lied von der Erde* (San Francisco Ballet, Vallejo Symphony); Holiday Gaiety (San

ARTIST PROFILES CONTINUED

Francisco Symphony)
San Francisco Adler Fellowship
Program: 2023, 2024
Merola Opera Program: 2021, 2022
Website: nikolaprintz.com
Instagram: @Itisnika



**OLIVIER
ZEROUALI** 🎵
Baritone
(Middletown,
Delaware)
Motorcycle Cop
San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Trojan #2 in *Idomeneo*;
Marullo in *Rigoletto*
Recent and Upcoming: Silvio in a scene
from *Pagliacci* (Merola Opera Program);
Song As Drama recital (Merola);
Malatesta in a scene from *Don Pasquale*
(Merola Grand Finale); Robert in *Iolanta*
(Yale Opera Theatre); Betto in *Gianni
Schicchi* (Yale); Brother in Kurt Weill's
The Seven Deadly Sins (Yale); Mercutio in
Roméo et Juliette (Glimmerglass
Festival); workshops of Olivia Shortt's
The Museum of the Lost and Found and
Ashley Au's *Inertia* (Highlands Opera
Studio)
San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship
Program: 2025
Merola Opera Program: 2024



SAMUEL KIDD 🎵
Baritone
(Ann Arbor, Michigan)
First Prison Guard
San Francisco Opera
Highlights: Schaunard
in *La Bohème*; Morales

in *Carmen*; Christiano in *Un Ballo in
Maschera*; Steersman in *Tristan und
Isolde*; Marcello in *Bohème Out of the Box*
Recent and Upcoming: Papageno in *Die
Zauberflöte* (Opera Naples); Tarquinius in
The Rape of Lucretia (Merola Opera
Program, Yale Opera); Belcore in *L'Elisir
d'Amore* (Yale); title role of *Eugene
Onegin* (Music Academy of the West);

Perennials concert (New York Festival of
Song); *Metamorphosis* recital (Merola);
Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* (Cincinnati
Song Initiative, University of Michigan)
San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship
Program: 2024, 2025
Merola Opera Program: 2023



PHILIP SKINNER 🎵
Bass-Baritone
(Jackson, Tennessee)
Second Prison Guard
San Francisco Opera
Highlights: Barak's
One-Eyed Brother in

Die Frau ohne Schatten; Baron Douphol
in *La Traviata*; Lepidus in John Adams'
Antony and Cleopatra; Dansker in *Billy
Budd*; Duke of Verona in *Roméo et
Juliette*; Geronte de Ravier in *Manon
Lescaut*; Doctor Bartolo in *The Barber of
Seville*; King Priam in *Les Troyens*; Edgar
Ray Killen in Philip Glass' *Appomattox*;
Speaker in *Die Zauberflöte*; Rambaldo in
La Rondine; Thibaut in *Orleanskaya
Dyeva*; Water Spirit in *Rusalka*;
Escamillo in *Carmen*; Ferrando in *Il
Trovatore*; Colline in *La Bohème*;
Lorenzo in *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*
Recent and Upcoming: Beethoven's
Ninth Symphony (Carnegie Hall); Wotan
and Gunther in *The Legend of the Ring*
(West Edge Opera); Monterone in
Rigoletto (Opera San José); Speaker in
The Magic Flute (San José); Benoit and
Alcindoro in *La Bohème* (San José); Iago
in *Otello* (Livermore Valley Opera); Verdi
Requiem (San Francisco Choral Society);
Nikitisch in *Boris Godunov* (San Francisco
Symphony); King Marke in *Tristan und
Isolde* (Claude Heater Foundation)
San Francisco Opera Medal 2022
San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship
Program: 1986, 1987
Merola Opera Program: 1985



RYLAN TORRES 🎵
Tenor
(Fresno, California)
**Older Brother to
Joseph**
**Recent and
Upcoming:** Co-

Founders (American Conservatory
Theater); *As You Like It* (San Francisco
Playhouse); *The Comedy of Errors*
(SPARC Theater)
Instagram:
@ryan_graduates_no_ceremony



JACKSON HORTON 🎵
Tenor
(Walnut Creek,
California)
**Younger Brother to
Joseph**
Recent and

Upcoming: Greg in *The Metamorphosis*;
Alex in *Orchard Hill*; King Oberon in *A
Midsummer Night's Dream* (Curtains Up
Youth Theatre)
Instagram: @Jacksonian9000



ANNA KOSIAREK 🎵
(Oakland, California)
Teenage Girl
**Recent and
Upcoming:** Alicia in
The Thanksgiving Play
(Altarena Playhouse);

Evie in *In Love and Warcraft* (City Lights
Theater Company); Sister James in
Doubt (Altarena Playhouse); *True To Life*
(on tour); Eve Harrington in *The Wisdom
of Eve* (Altarena Playhouse)
Instagram: @annakosiarek
Website: annakosiarek.com



CHRIS COSTANZ 🎵
(Los Angeles,
California)
Teenage Boy
**Recent and
Upcoming:** *Tiny
Beautiful Things*

ARTIST PROFILES CONTINUED

(Hulu); *Vacation Friends 2*; *Magnum P.I.*; *Groundswell* (Hallmark Channel); *The Young and the Restless* (CBS); *All About Sex* (AppleTV+) @chriscozanz



MARY HOSKINS, ♪+

Soprano
(Saratoga Springs, Utah)

Paralegal

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Cretan

Woman #2 in *Idomeneo*

Recent and Upcoming: Title role in the final scene of *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Schwabacher Summer Concert); excerpts from *Fidelio* and Strauss' *Die Ägyptische Helena* (Merola Grand Finale); scenes concert as Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*, Mimi in *La Bohème*, Mary in Gregory Spears' *Fellow Travelers*, and First Lady in *Die Zauberflöte* (Wolf Trap Opera); arias from *Don Giovanni* and *Pagliacci* (Dolora Zajick's Institute for Young Dramatic Voices)
San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship Program: 2025
Merola Opera Program: 2024



DANIELLE CHEIKEN, ♪

Soprano
(Jacksonville, Florida)

Sister Catherine

Recent and

Upcoming: Adina in

L'Elisir d'Amore (San Francisco Opera Guild); Maggie Winslow in *A Chorus Line* (SF Playhouse); Young Phyllis/Young Heidi in *Follies* (SF Playhouse); Mary and Opera Singer in *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* (Shotgun Players); Winnie Winslow in *No, No, Nanette* (42nd Street Moon); Frauline Silberklang in *Der Schauspieldirektor* (Austria)
Member of San Francisco Opera Regular Chorus



WHITNEY STEELE, ♪

Mezzo-Soprano
(Portland, Oregon)

Sister Lillianne

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Widow in Poul Ruders and

Paul Bentley's *The Handmaid's Tale*; Page in *Lohengrin*; Guadalupe Ponti in Gabriela Lena Frank and Nilo Cruz's *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*; Aunt in *Madama Butterfly*
Recent and Upcoming: Quartet in Joby Talbot and Gene Scheer's *Everest* (Opera Parallèle)
Member of San Francisco Opera Regular Chorus



SALLY MOUZON, ♪

Mezzo-Soprano
(Alexandria, Virginia)

First Mother

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Sister Lillianne in Jake

Heggie and Terrence McNally's *Dead Man Walking*; Una Popolana (Old Woman) in Marco Tutino's *Two Women*; Joan in Christopher Theofanidis' *Heart of a Soldier*
Recent and Upcoming: Elle in *La Voix Humaine* (West Coast Opera)
Member of San Francisco Opera Regular Chorus
@sallymezzo



LIESL MCPHERRIN, ♪

Soprano
(Yuba City, California)

Mrs. Charlton

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Page in *Lohengrin*;

Receptionist in Mason Bates and Mark Campbell's *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*; Flower/Lady-in-Waiting in Bright Sheng and David Henry Hwang's *Dream of the Red Chamber*
Recent and Upcoming: Adina in *The*

Elixir of Love and Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute* (Livermore Valley Opera educational and community programs)
Member of San Francisco Opera Regular Chorus



ZACHARY COWAN, ♪

(Oceanside, California)

Anthony De Rocher

Recent and

Upcoming: *NCIS*

(CBS); *Sweetwater* (WB); *General Hospital* (ABC); *Hunters* (Amazon); *Sugar* (Apple); *Perry Mason* (HBO); *Monsters* (Netflix); *The Calling*
@zachcowman



KEVIN GINO, ♪

Tenor
(Diamond Bar, California)

First Inmate

San Francisco Opera

Highlights:

Commander X in Poul Ruders and Paul Bentley's *The Handmaid's Tale*; Uncle Yakuside in *Madama Butterfly*
Recent and Upcoming: Alfred in *Die Fledermaus* (Pocket Opera); Camille in *Die Lustige Witwe* (Pocket Opera); Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* (Pocket Opera); engagements with San Francisco Symphony Chorus, Opera San José, West Edge Opera, Opera Parallèle, American Bach Soloists, Ars Minerva, Mendocino Music Festival
Member of San Francisco Opera Regular Chorus



WILLIAM LEE BRYAN, ♪

Baritone
(Saint Paul, Minnesota)

Second Inmate

San Francisco Opera

Highlights: Officer in *The Barber of*

ARTIST PROFILES CONTINUED

Seville; Sergeant in *Manon Lescaut*;
various roles in *Billy Budd*;
A Captain/Zaretsky in *Eugene Onegin*;
Messenger in *La Traviata*
Member of San Francisco Opera
Regular Chorus
Facebook: @williamleebryan (edited)



CHESTER PIDDUCK
Tenor
(Saint Louis, Missouri)

Third Inmate
San Francisco Opera
Highlights: Mr. Martini
in Jake Heggie and

Gene Scheer's *It's a Wonderful Life*;
Waiter in *Arabella*; Pargpignol in
La Bohème; Nantucket Sailor in
Heggie and Scheer's *Moby-Dick*
Recent and Upcoming: Beppe in
Pagliacci (Fresno Youth Orchestra); tenor
soloist in *Carmina Burana* (CSU Fresno);
tenor soloist in Mozart Requiem (St.
Helena Choral Society); Prince Ramiro in
La Cenerentola (San Francisco Opera
Guild's Opera Together program);
Almaviva in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (Opera
San José, Mendocino Music Festival);
Nemorino in *L'Elisir d'Amore* (West Bay
Opera); Rodolfo in *La Bohème* (Opera San
Luis Obispo); *Carmina Burana* (San
Francisco Symphony, Sacramento Choral
Society and Orchestra)
Member of San Francisco Opera
Regular Chorus



JOHN FULTON
Baritone
(Charlotte, North
Carolina)

Fourth Inmate
San Francisco Opera
Highlights: Aldeano

#1 in Gabriela Lena Frank and Nilo
Cruz's *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*;
John in Rhiannon Giddens and Michael
Abels' *Omar*; Moralès in *Carmen*
Member of San Francisco Opera
Regular Chorus



NIKOLAS NACKLEY
Baritone
(Piedmont, California)

Fifth Inmate
San Francisco Opera
Highlights:
Customhouse Officer

in *La Bohème*

Recent and Upcoming: Soloist in
Mozart Requiem (Arizona Musicfest);
Cpt. Bouchardon in *Mata Hari* (West
Edge Opera); soloist (LA Philharmonic,
Cal Performances); Pallante in *Agrippina*
(West Edge Opera); title role of *Il Ritorno*
d'Ulisse in Patria (West Edge Opera)
Member of San Francisco Opera
Regular Chorus

Creative Team



LEONARD FOGLIA
(Boston,
Massachusetts)

Director
San Francisco Opera
Highlights: Jake
Heggie and Gene

Scheer's *Three Decembers*, *Moby-Dick*,
It's a Wonderful Life

Recent and Upcoming: *Moby-Dick*
(Metropolitan Opera); Joby Talbot and
Gene Scheer's *The Diving Bell and the*
Butterfly (Dallas Opera); Iain Bell and
Mark Campbell's *Stonewall* (New York
City Opera); Laurence Fishburne's *Like*
They Do in the Movies
Librettist of Ricky Ian Gordon's *A Coffin in*
Egypt, José "Pepe" Martínez's *Cruzar la*
Cara de la Luna, Martínez's *El Pasado*
Nunca Se Termina, Javier Martínez's
El Milagro del Recuerdo



KATRINA BACHUS
(Chicago, Illinois)

Associate Director
Recent and
Upcoming: *Aida* (LA
Opera); Jake Heggie
and Terrence

McNally's *Dead Man Walking* (Lyric
Opera of Chicago); *Jenůfa* (Chicago); the
Ring cycle (Chicago)
Associate and Assistant Stage Director
at Lyric Opera of Chicago, The
Metropolitan Opera, and LA Opera



MICHAEL MCGARTY
(Providence, Rhode
Island)

Set Designer
Recent and Upcoming:
Designs for regional
theaters, Broadway,

Off Broadway, London's West End
Resident Designer at Trinity Repertory
Company
Adjunct faculty at Rhode Island School
of Design



JESS GOLDSTEIN
(New York, New York)

Costume Designer
San Francisco Opera
Highlights: Marco
Tutino's *Two Women*;
Christopher

Theofanidis' *Heart of a Soldier*
Recent and Upcoming: *Il Trittico*
(Metropolitan Opera); *La Traviata*
(Washington National Opera); Jake
Heggie and Terrence McNally's *Dead*
Man Walking (Lyric Opera of Chicago)
Tony Award for *The Rivals*

ARTIST PROFILES CONTINUED



BRIAN NASON
(New York, New York)
Lighting Designer
San Francisco Opera
Highlights: Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *Three Decembers* and *It's a*

Wonderful Life

Recent and Upcoming: José "Pepe" Martínez's *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* (Opera San Antonio, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Amarillo Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Quito's Teatro Sucre); Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally's *Dead Man Walking* (Madrid's Teatro Real, Lyric Opera of Chicago)



ELAINE J. MCCARTHY
(Arlington, Massachusetts)
Projection Designer
San Francisco Opera
Highlights:

Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *Moby-Dick* and *It's a Wonderful Life*

Recent and Upcoming: *Wicked* (Broadway); Anna Deavere Smith's *Notes from the Field*; Heggie and Scheer's *Moby-Dick* (Metropolitan Opera); Joby Talbot's *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (Dallas Opera); Talbot's *Everest* (London's Barbican Centre, Calgary Opera); Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally's *Dead Man Walking* (Lyric Opera of Chicago, Madrid's Teatro Real)

ROGER GANS
(San Francisco, California)
Sound Designer

San Francisco Opera Highlights: Former Resident Sound Designer for over 25 years
Recent and Upcoming: West Kowloon Cultural District Xiqu Centre; New York's Central Park Summer Stage sound system



JOHN KEENE
(Lancaster, Pennsylvania)
Chorus Director
San Francisco Opera
Highlights: *Don Giovanni*; Bright

Sheng and David Henry Hwang's *Dream of the Red Chamber*; Eun Sun Kim Conducts Verdi; John Adams' *Antony and Cleopatra*; Eugene Onegin; *Dialogues of the Carmelites*; *La Traviata*; *Orpheus and Eurydice*; *Madama Butterfly*; *Die Frau ohne Schatten*; Gabriela Lena Frank and Nilo Cruz's *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*; 100th Anniversary Concert; *Il Trovatore*; Mason Bates and Mark Campbell's *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*; *Lohengrin*; Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels' *Omar*; *The Elixir of Love*; *The Magic Flute*; Kaija Saariaho's *Innocence*; *Un Ballo in Maschera*; Poul Ruders and Paul Bentley's *The Handmaid's Tale*; *Tristan und Isolde*; Beethoven's Ninth Symphony; *Carmen*; *La Bohème*; *Idomeneo*; *Rigoletto*
Recent and Upcoming: *Parsifal*; Huang Ruo and David Henry Hwang's *The Monkey King*; *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*; *Elektra*

Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition and San Francisco Conservatory of Music Voice Concerto Competition judge
Instagram: @keenejohn



DAVE MAIER
(El Cerrito, California)
Fight Director
San Francisco Opera
Highlights:

Il Trovatore; John Adams' *Antony and Cleopatra*; *Carmen*; *Tosca*; the *Ring* cycle; *Pagliacci*; *Rigoletto*; *Romeo and Juliet*; *Billy Budd*
Recent and Upcoming: *Zorro* (Opera San José); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Marin Shakespeare Company); *Romeo/Juliet* (Marin Shakespeare

Company); *Private Lives* (A.C.T.); *Fat Ham* (SF Playhouse); *Ironbound* (Oakland Theater Project)



MAYA HERBSMAN
(San Francisco, California)
Intimacy Coordinator
San Francisco Opera
Highlights: John

Adams' *Antony and Cleopatra*; *La Traviata*; Poul Ruders and Paul Bentley's *The Handmaid's Tale*
Recent and Upcoming: *The Rape of Lucretia* (Merola); engagements with Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Marin Theatre, California Shakespeare Theater, TheatreWorks Silicon Valley, Center Repertory Theatre; Alexis Black and Tina Newhauser's *Supporting Staged Intimacy*
Facebook: @Maya Herbsman
Instagram: @maya.herbs

First performance: San Francisco, War Memorial Opera House; October 7, 2000

Dead Man Walking was performed by San Francisco Opera in one previous season for its world premiere. The opera has since been presented in more than 80 productions around the world. This season marks the 25th anniversary of *Dead Man Walking* and its return to the War Memorial Opera House stage. For complete information on the world premiere personnel, visit archive.sfopera.com

Personnel: 29 principals, 36 choristers, 16 child choristers, 31 supernumeraries; **112 total**

Orchestra: 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo and alto flutes), 2 oboes, 1 english horn, 2 clarinets, 1 bass clarinet, 3 bassoons (3rd doubling contrabassoon), 5 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 timpani, 2 percussion, 1 harp, 1 piano, 40 strings (12 first violins, 9 second violins, 7 violas, 7 cellos, 5 basses); **68 total**

Dead Man Walking at 25

AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE OPERA'S CREATION,
WORLD PREMIERE IN SAN FRANCISCO, AND LEGACY

The following are samples from a series of interviews conducted by San Francisco Opera Dramaturg Emeritus Kip Cranna with participants in the 2000 world premiere of *Dead Man Walking*. To hear audio samples from the interviews, read full transcripts, and view archival resources relating to the world premiere by San Francisco Opera, go to sfopera.com/digital.

Jake Heggie: It was because of Lotfi [Mansouri, general director of San Francisco Opera 1988–2001]. I have to give all the credit to him ... Lotfi was willing to take chances. He was a true impresario. He had vision, he had passion, and he had imagination about what could happen.

Elena Park: Flicka [Frederica van Stade], Renée Fleming, Carol Vaness, Jenny Larmore ... all of these artists started to request that Jake write for them ... “Do you have any songs for me?” People would show up in the PR department, and we’d think they had a question but they’d say, “Just here to talk to Jake!” [Lotfi] was very savvy, and, you know, he was picking up that singers of great stature

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

(and their *Dead Man Walking* roles 25 years ago)

Jake Heggie, former San Francisco Opera public relations associate and composer of *Dead Man Walking*

Elena Park, San Francisco Opera public relations manager

Catherine Cook, mezzo-soprano who performed *Sister Helen Prejean* in the workshop (1999) and *Jade Boucher* at the premiere (2000)

Frederica von Stade, mezzo-soprano who performed *Mrs. Patrick De Rocher*

Kip Cranna, San Francisco Opera music administrator

Megan Kellogg, San Francisco Girls Chorus member

Lori Harrison, prop master who visited Angola Prison for research

John Del Bono, stagehand who helped build the production



Sister Helen Prejean and Susan Graham at the premiere.
SAN FRANCISCO OPERA ARCHIVES



Jake Heggie (composer), Terrence McNally (librettist), Joe Mantello (director), and Kip Cranna (artistic administrator). / SAN FRANCISCO OPERA ARCHIVES

and talent were recognizing in Jake that there was something extraordinary. [Conductor] Patrick Summers, I think, also recognized the talent. Lotfi observed all of this and seized upon this idea ... and followed up really quickly to have a serious conversation about it.

JH: I won a competition through G. Schirmer, and I remember there was a party one night, and Lotfi said to me, “So, Jake, you’re writing all these songs for all these singers. They’re taking them all over the world and performing them, and they seem to love them. Have you ever thought about writing an opera?” I kind of looked at him, “No, not really (laughs). I haven’t because it’s so overwhelming and massive.” He says, “Well, I think you’re a theater composer. I think we should talk.”

The next day, I’m at work and thinking, you know, he was just making party conversation ... and my phone rings ... So I go over with my pad, ready to write the next press release or whatever. He says, “Put the pad down. Let’s talk about your opera. So, we have a slot in the 2000 season on the mainstage. I want to send you to New York. I’ve been trying to get Terrence McNally to agree to write a libretto, and I want to see if you guys hit it off and if you’d be a good pair.” And I’m looking around, like, *who are you talking to?* (laughs) He opened this door, and I thought, what have I got to lose? I am jumping through that door!

Lotfi was all in and made contact with Sister Helen. My phone rang one day, I pick it up, and she goes, “This is Sister Helen Prejean. I’d like to speak to Jake Heggie ... I understand you want to make an opera out of *Dead Man*

Walking. You know what I said to that, Jake? I said, ‘Of course we’re gonna make an opera out of *Dead Man Walking*!’ But, Jake, I don’t know boo-scat about opera, so you’re gonna have to educate me ... Now, Jake, I know you’re going to have to change things. You’re going to have to rewrite. You’re going to have to add things, take away. You know, it’s for the stage. It’s not the book. The only thing I ask is that it stay a story of redemption.” And I said, “Absolutely, a hundred percent.” And then we were off and running.

Catherine Cook: It truly was groundbreaking because there weren’t many operas being written about social justice issues, and Sister Helen’s story ... I’d read the book, I’d seen the movie. It was just such a fabulous story. Up until then I don’t think many people were really being that bold to write an opera about capital punishment.

Frederica von Stade: I was just lucky and over the moon to be asked to do *Dead Man Walking*. Jake loves the human voice, so I knew everything would be great, working with him. It’s such a fascinating and vitally important subject to explore, and what better way to explore this subject than through music and through storytelling, so that people come alive and are part of a very important life instance that we all need to know about. It came up that he was going to partner with Terrence McNally, and that I think they had another story in mind first, and then it came around to *Dead Man Walking*. Jake asked me to sing Sister Helen [Prejean] at first. And I just felt I was senior enough

at that point that there were just too many wonderful younger singers, and I said, “I really, really with all my heart want to be in it—please let me be in it—but I just don’t think I’m right for Sister Helen.” And there was marvelous Susie Graham, and Jake asked me to take my choice: one of the parents of the kids who were murdered, or the mother of the convict, and I chose that part. Exploring this woman through Jake’s eyes and through Terrence’s eyes was this amazing gift to me. It made me look at my own motherhood in a whole different way and realize how much of your child’s life you can’t predict and can’t control ... and you hate that, and you hate it about yourself that you can’t make the world pure and good for them.

JH: We had the first act done by November of that year, and then we did the second act, and then we had a workshop in August of ’99 and we needed to make some changes, and then I had to orchestrate. So, it happened—boom, boom, boom!

Kip Cranna: We workshopped it in the summer of 1999, and that was a fascinating process. Quite a few of the singers who were in that workshop would ultimately

create the roles that would be premiered the following year. Even with a piano workshop where people are basically learning their roles ... it was obvious that this was going to be a piece of some significance.

CC: [I found the music to be] a little bit [hard to learn]. There’s always an unexpected turn here and there. Rhythmically, you might struggle for a little bit, but once you know it, it’s like, *Oh! This can’t be written any other way.* It makes so much sense how [Jake] sets text, and how he can sort of build an arc of a scene in the drama. He knows the voice, and not all composers have that gift.

Lori Harrison: [I took] a trip to the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola ... visiting death row and visiting their execution chamber, of which I took many pictures, including of the real execution table that they used. We recreated it down to the inch, every strap, every piece of metal. John Del Bono was our master welder at the time, so he pretty much built that table.

John Del Bono: My biggest recollection of *Dead Man Walking* was this amazing amount of research that [Prop Master] Lori Harrison had done. She came armed with a



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Susan Graham as Sister Helen Prejean looks on as John Packard (Joseph De Rocher) is taken to his execution by guards John Del Bono and Stephen O'Reilly. / KEN FRIEDMAN



portfolio of photos and drawings and measurements of the actual death chamber in Angola, and its lethal injection table. She was absolutely dead set that we were going to prop this show exactly as it needed to be done. *Dead Man Walking* was when I first realized I was in the arts, and that we were here to put the best we can in front of the audience.

JH: Terrence gave me the greatest gift. That libretto is a work of genius. Being a theater guy, he wanted to establish everything in theater terms, to make sure we're not trying to put the book on the stage; we're not trying to put the movie on the stage; this is for the opera house.

That's why he wanted to stage the crime, so that we see who did it, we see what he did, we know who's guilty. The purpose of the opera is not to prove whether he's guilty. We have total clarity. This is very different from the journey that Sister Helen was on. She *didn't* know. We see it as the audience. We are witnesses.

KP: It was pretty clear by the second scene that something fairly special was going on. We begin with this brutal murder, and it's pretty intense. It's a tough scene to watch. Then—bam!—we're hit with the really upbeat scene where Sister Helen is teaching her little hymn to the kids in the school that the nuns run, and this turns into almost a Broadway number. It was clear that this

was kind of a dramatic masterstroke, to break that tension with something so engaging.

JH: There was such a feeling of support through the whole thing. It was remarkable to feel that love and support from all those singers, from all my colleagues who were marveling that this thing was happening.

Megan Kellogg: I was in the San Francisco Girls Chorus, level three or four, so more advanced. I remember it feeling like a very intimate experience, performing with such a small group of kids, because we could hear our own voices, you know, onstage and offstage. Running onstage, you couldn't see the audience because the lights were so bright, but you could feel the vastness of the Opera House. So, it was incredibly exciting.

CC: One thing that I feel the opera does so well is it really helps us see inside of these characters, of what it would be like if your son was accused, and what it would be like if your child was the victim. I get choked up thinking about it right now. I found out that the person that I was playing [Jade Boucher] did not believe in the death penalty ... and that really changed the way I played the character, because obviously you're grieving and you have anger about what's happened, but she didn't want Joe to die.

LH: The [execution] machine was designed by Michael Yeargan, and it had little glass syringes that were visible on it ... My notes very clearly show that there are three solutions, and the timing of those injections ... that was explained to me when I was there.

This all happens in complete silence. There's no music. Some critics pointed that out to Jake, asking him if he was unable to write music for this, and he responded that he didn't think we needed any "death music," that we'd heard enough already, and so it's quite a scene unfolding in silence.

I know that in the moments leading up to that silence, there is an exceptionally moving piece of music. I believe it was the Lord's Prayer that was being sung in many-part harmony. When I first saw that, in the rehearsal hall from afar, in street clothes, and [with] a piano, just going through that the first time, I was crying.

JDB: This is one of my seminal operatic moments: We were told that we were going to do a full run-through ... and they wanted "the chair." I had been warned that myself and [stagehand] Steve O'Reilly were going to be in



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costume and we were actually going to be the ones manipulating the chair for the show. Now, I'm pure theater technician. I've never acted ... I was a little nervous about the fact that I had to go out and do that, but it was the table I built and I knew I was the right person to manipulate it. And then it was time for us to go and grab [John Packard as Joseph], and take him to the chair. I grabbed his arm and I was really surprised that he resisted me ... And so, instinctively, I grabbed him harder, which surprised *me* (laughs)! We're walking him up to the chair, we're ... strapping him in, and he's trembling, and I'm like, *Oh, this is intense*. I find myself trembling, also. We get him strapped in, and then we get to the point where Steve and I are supposed to step back, and he [Joseph] sings an aria, then Sister Prejean sings ... I looked up, and everyone ... was bawling. I have never experienced anything like that in my life, and it's still probably the most powerful emotional experience of my opera career. I really didn't see that coming, and I was blown away. It changed my whole perspective of this company, and what we're doing, and why it's important.

KC: One of my distinct memories—and there are photographs of this—is that after the prisoner is strapped to this table, with his arms out straight to the sides, he's lifted upright, sort of like he's on a cross.

LH: It is actually done that way. That table did move into exactly that position. They roll it in front of a big plate glass window. The other side of the plate glass window are chairs. The family of the victim is invited to sit on that side. There's a curtain that they open up and it's mic-ed, and he's allowed to give his final words ... The family can actually witness that execution and he has a chance to make whatever amends he can at that point.

The opera company got a letter from a very angry patron, who felt that they were turning this criminal into a Christ-like figure by upping the table and having him hanging there with his arms extended. I had to ... carefully craft a response. I talked about how I went to the penitentiary and took photographs and measurements, and that that was exactly the table, and that this was exactly what they did.

KP: There's always a tremendous excitement about opening nights of a new piece ... It's always unpredictable and a bit of a guessing game of what's going to happen.

JH: The audience is the last character to show up, and you don't know what you have until then ... You just don't

know until it's completely on its feet, it's staged, costumed, the orchestra is there, and it's opening night. There's people there with all kinds of differing opinions about whether they think it's actually going to work or not, but there was great curiosity and energy about it. And I knew that it was very powerful and that it was very effective. I had no idea what the real response would be, because, of course, I was unproven as an opera composer.

Sister Helen came up to me and said, "Jake, this is a big night. Your job tonight is just to stay present in the moment. Don't think about what led up. Don't think about what's gonna happen next. Stay in the moment." And I did.

CC: I knew it was going to be a huge success. There were protestors outside of the Opera House on both sides [of the death penalty issue]. It got people talking, and it was really a huge moment, I feel, in opera history. I don't say that lightly. Things changed after *Dead Man Walking*, and people started taking more risks ... It changed people's lives. It changed my life.

JH: Sister Helen was so happy and so grateful. She said, "Tonight, 3,000 people witnessed an execution ... this thing that happens in the middle of the night, that they try to keep secret and out of everyone's eyes. You saw a human being. You didn't see an archetype; you saw a human being be executed, one that said, 'I love you,' and those were his last words."

FVS: [The opera] was very controversial at the time, and that needs to be said. But I thought it was going to be an enormous success, a controversial success, maybe, but a success, because of the truth of it. It's a true story, and it's a story that you don't usually confront in opera—or you don't think you do, but where do you go for murder and intrigue and sorrow and grief and jumping off turrets, but the opera house? And at first, you know, I thought, well, starting with a murder and ending with an execution isn't a great recipe for a great evening in the opera (laughs), but that's not the only mission of opera. The opera is to tell a story, and this is a story, a human love story between Sister Helen and Joe, and Mrs. De Rocher and Sister Helen, and the children and the parents. It's an exploration that has a very wide ring around it. Like you throw a rock in the lake and it makes a very satisfying plop, and then all the rings go out ... Every time I've done this piece that has been my experience. The ring encompasses a lot of people.

JH: By the end, when there's that silence of the execution and the pause after, and then Sister Helen steps forward and sings *a capella* [unaccompanied] the tune that she sang at the beginning—the hymn—you could feel in the house ... an active, fraught silence. What could be more powerful than an activated stillness and silence? But it went on so long, and ... I was a wreck. Then when those lights went off, that place just exploded, and I knew it was really special.

MK: I was a freshman in high school, and if I hadn't done *Dead Man Walking* I honestly don't know where I would be, because it ignited a passion for opera that had not been there.

KP: Shortly after our premiere, a consortium was formed of seven different opera companies, with a new production in mind that was directed by Leonard Foglia, and that's the production that we're essentially doing this season, with some modifications, here in San Francisco. It's been done in many, many places now, and I've seen quite a few. What's been fascinating is seeing the variety of artists that have taken on these roles. It was hard not to think of the original performance as sort of definitive, particularly Frederica von Stade as Mrs. De Rocher, the mother of the convict. Her scene where she pleads for her son's life before the Parole Board is indelibly etched in my mind.

CC: I'm so happy that the opera has been done so much, because it's one of the best, really, that we have. It has been performed by so many different artists all over the world, and that is a true testament to how amazing this piece is and how it connects with people. 🌟



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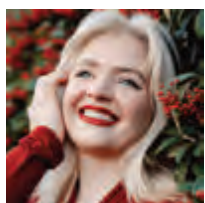
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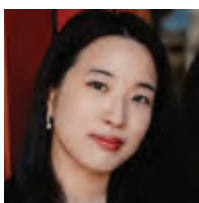
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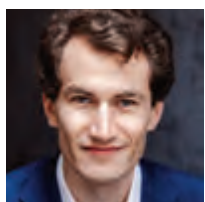
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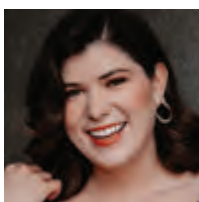
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The Monkey King is Coming



The Monkey King costume designs by Anita Yavich for the gods Erlang and his brothers.

San Francisco Opera recently announced the formation of The Monkey King Committee. This distinguished and diverse array of influential leaders spanning business, nonprofit, tech and cultural sectors have come together in support of one of the most anticipated world premieres of recent years, composer Huang Ruo and librettist David Henry Hwang's *The Monkey King* (猴王悟空), which opens November 14. The Committee is led by San Francisco Opera Board of Directors members and Committee Co-Chairs Jerome Dodson, Doreen Woo Ho and Soo Venkatesan. The Committee's Honorary Chairs are Jensen and Lori Huang.

"*The Monkey King* is a timeless epic that celebrates courage, transformation, and the spirit of adventure," said Jensen Huang, founder and CEO of NVIDIA. "This reimagining of the classic *Journey to the West*—brought to

life on the San Francisco Opera stage—is a breathtaking fusion of Chinese legend and American craftsmanship and artistry coming together for an incredible display."

"I am excited to lead this Committee to promote and fundraise for this innovative and unique opera that brings the best of the best of Chinese classics to the operatic stage," said Committee Co-Chair Doreen Woo Ho. "To me this opera also represents a huge opportunity to build a people-to-people cultural bridge between the U.S. and China as Monkey King, who is such a beloved figure, resonates across so many Asian communities here and in Asia."

To learn how you can support the world premiere of *The Monkey King*, please contact Donor Services at donorservices@sfopera.com or (415) 565-3212 or visit sfopera.com/monkey-king-circle.

FOCUS ON PARSIFAL

In anticipation of San Francisco Opera's new production of *Parsifal* (opening October 25), The Wagner Society of Northern California will present two lectures designed to bring you deeper into Richard Wagner's masterpiece. Writer, musician and former Zen Buddhist monk Paul Schofield presents "The Redeemer Reborn: *Parsifal* as the Fifth Opera of Wagner's Ring" on Saturday, October 18 at 1 p.m. as a Zoom webinar. Then, on November 1 at 1 p.m., Stanford University Professor Emeritus of Music Thomas Grey presents "Outside/Inside: Sacred Spaces in *Parsifal*" at the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco. For more information, visit wagnersf.org.



San Francisco Opera's 1964 production of *Parsifal* with Giorgio Tozzi as Gurnemanz, Sandor Konya as Parsifal, and Irene Dalis as Kundry.
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The Monkey King Circle

Join *The Monkey King* Giving Circle, and be a part of an extraordinary journey! In fall 2025, San Francisco Opera premieres a new opera by Huang Ruo and David Henry Hwang, inspired by the timeless tale: *Journey to the West*. Your support will help bring this iconic story to life on stage, filled with mythical adventures, rich cultural history, and stunning music. As a member, you'll receive exclusive benefits that will transport you behind the scenes of this groundbreaking production.



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*Please contact events@sfopera.com if you would like to be placed on a waitlist.

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David Adam Moore
Sally Mouzon
Brian Mulligan
Christopher Nachtrab
Nikolas Nackley
Sarah Nadreau
Antonio Nagore
William O'Neill
Christopher Oglesby+
Andrew Pardini
Jusung Gabriel Park*
Yulan Piao
Chester Pidduck
Laurel Porter
Nikola Printz+
Ben Reisinger
Brittany Renee
Kindra Scharich
Chad Shelton
Philip Skinner+
Olivia Smith+†
Jonathan Smucker
David Soar
Whitney Steele
Falk Struckmann
Elisa Sunshine+
Jesslyn Thomas
Ryan Torres*
Marcos Vedovetto■
Sebastian Villalobos
Kang Wang*
Samuel White+†
Hongni Wu
Wei Wu
WooYoung Yoon+
Kwangchul Youn
Yongzhao Yu*
Adela Zaharia
Olivier Zerouali+†
Huiwang Zhang*■
Mei Gui Zhang+

CONDUCTORS

Eun Sun Kim
Carolyn Kuan*
Benjamin Manis
Patrick Summers+

PRODUCTION

Keith Warner

STAGE DIRECTORS

Katrina Bachus*
José Maria Condemi+
Leonard Foglia
Matthew Ozawa
Diane Paulus*
Roy Rallo
Basil Twist*

CHOREOGRAPHERS

Rena Butler
Jamie Guan*
Ann Yee*

KEY:

American Debut
* San Francisco Opera
Debut
† Current Adler Fellow
+ Merola Opera Program
Graduate
◇ Adler Fellowship
Graduate
■ Solo Dancer
Cover Artist

Chorus

John Keene, *Chorus Director*
Fabrizio Corona, *Associate Chorus Master*

REGULAR CHORUS

William Lee BryanΩ	Silvie JensenΩ	Liesl McPherrinΩ
Anders Froehlich	Sally MouzonΩ	Angela Eden Moser
John FultonΩ	Sarah Nadreau	Elisabeth Rom Lucio
Harlan Hays	Erin Neff	Jesslyn Thomas
Nikolas NackleyΩ	Laurel Porter	C. Michael BelleΩ
Andrew Thomas PardiniΩ	Whitney SteeleΩ	Alan Cochran
Wilford Kelly	Jacque Wilson	Kevin GinoΩ
Bojan Knezevic+ William O'NeillΩ	Nadima Avakian	Christopher Jackson
William Pickersgill	Kathleen Bayler	Michael JankoskyΩ
Samuel Rabinowitz	Cheryl Cain	Eric Levintow
Buffy Baggot	Danielle CheikenΩ	Antonio Nagore
Janet Campbell	Hannah Cho+	Philip Pickens
Edith Dowd	Sara Colburn	Chester PidduckΩ
Stella HannockΩ	Crystal Kim	Jonathan Smucker
	Josephine Lee	Andrew Truett

EXTRA CHORUS

Callum Alden	Leandra Ramm
Spencer Dodd	Dewey Reikofski
Elliott JG Encarnación	Clifton Romig
Luis González	Chung-Wai Soong
Matt Hidalgo	Lee Steward
David Kekuewa	Paul Thompson
Michael Jesse Kuo	Taylor Thompson
Yitao Lin	Carmello Tringali
Benjamin Liupaogo	Troy Turriate
Joachim Luis	Nicolas Vasquez-Gerst
Justin Marsh	Lawrence Venza
Michael Orlinksy	Nicholas Volkert
Alexander John Perkins	Daniel Yoder
Valery Portnov	

√ Chorus member on leave of absence
Ω Solo Role

SAN FRANCISCO GIRLS CHORUS

Valérie Sainte-Agathe, *Artistic Director*

Avery Brandstetter •	Samsara Dluzak	Paloma Siliezar
Elena Carvajal	Jessie Li	Ellie Wong
Sofia Rose DeLuca	Gitanjali Menon	

SAN FRANCISCO BOYS CHORUS

Ian Robertson, *Artistic Director* • **Todd Jolly**, *Intermediate Chorus Director*

Landon Chai	Giovanni Mendoza	Jacob Rainow
Logan Cook	Niko Min	Dayton Thomas
Solah Malik	West Pinckaers	

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Orchestra

Eun Sun Kim, *Music Director*

FIRST VIOLIN

Kay Stern, *Concertmaster*
Maya Cohon, *Associate Concertmaster*
Heidi Wilcox,
Assistant Concertmaster
Jennifer Cho
Dawn Harms
Mariya Borozina
Naoko Nakajima
Barbara Riccardi
Dian Zhang
Leonid Igudesman
Jennifer Hsieh
Asuka Annie Yano

SECOND VIOLIN

Jeremy Preston, *Principal*
Martha Simonds, *Associate Principal*
Beni Shinohara, *Assistant Principal*
Leslie Ludena
Ka-Yeon Lee
Aya Kiyonaga
Craig Reiss
Heeguen Song↑

VIOLA

Carla Maria Rodrigues, *Principal*
Joy Fellows, *Associate Principal*Σ
Stephen Goist, *Acting Assistant Principal*
Natalia Vershilova
Lindan Burns
Emily Liu↑
Elizabeth Prior↑

CELLO

Sunny Yang, *Principal*
Thalia Moore, *Associate Principal*Σ
Peter Myers, *Assistant Principal*
Nora Pirquet↓
Emil Miland
Jung-Hsuan Ko
Ruth Lane
Saul Richmond-Rakerd↑

BASS

Joseph Lescher, *Principal*
Jonathan Lancelle,
Associate Principal
William Wasson,
Acting Assistant Principal
Shinji Eshima
Sean O'Hara↑

FLUTE

Julie McKenzie, *Principal*↓
Stephanie McNab, *Acting Principal*
Susan KangΣ↑
Michelle Caimotto↑

PICCOLO

Stephanie McNab
Susan Kang↑

OBOE

Mingjia Liu, *Principal*
Gabriel Young, *Associate Principal*Σ
Benjamin Brogadir
Rachel Ahn↑

ENGLISH HORN

Benjamin Brogadir

CLARINET

José González Granero, *Principal*
Rebecca Tobin KrissmanΣ↑
Junghwan Lee↑

BASS CLARINET

Junghwan Lee↑

BASSOON

Rufus Olivier, *Principal*
Daniel MacNeillΣ
Shawn Jones↑

CONTRABASSOON

Shawn Jones↑

FRENCH HORN

Kevin Rivard, *Principal*
Phillip Palmore
Brian McCarty, *Associate Principal*
Logan BryckΣ
Anthony Delivanis↑

TRUMPET

Adam Luftman, *Principal*
Scott Macomber↑
John Pearson

TROMBONE

Michael Cox, *Acting Principal*
Samuel Wamhoff↑
David Ridge

BASS TROMBONE

David Ridge, *Principal*

TUBA/CIMBASSO

Zachariah Spellman, *Principal*

TIMPANI

John Burgardt, *Principal*

PERCUSSION

Patricia Niemi, *Principal*
Victor AvdienkoΣ

HARP

Eleanor Kirk, *Acting Principal*

ADDITIONAL MUSICIANS

Bryndon Hassman, *Piano*

LIBRARIAN

Carrie Weick

↓ Leave of absence

Σ Principal for one or more

Summer season operas

↑ Season Substitute

Corps Dancers

Colm Seery, *Dance Master*

Brett Conway↔
Esther de Monteflores
Jamielyn Duggan↔
Alexandra FitzGibbon▯
Blanche Hampton↔
Emily Hansel
Bryan Ketron↓
Livanna Maislen
Coral Martin▯
Micah Moch▯
Christopher Nachtrab↔
Jessica Nguyen

Fred C Riley III
Chiharu Shibata↔
Gabrielle Sprauve
Marcos Vedovetto↔■
Sid Zhang

↔ Tenured
↓ Tenured Dancer
on Leave of Absence
▯ Resident Corps
■ Solo Role

Supernumeraries

Rigoletto

Mark Burstein • Richard Casse • Misha Derkavski
Michael Pinell • Ross Uchimura

Dead Man Walking

Susan August • Roman Chavez • Tiffany Cheng
Stacey Chien • Maria Dulmage • Karsten Guthridge
Maia Harris • Lori Head • Dieter Hellmoldt
Sandi Ippolito • Bernadette Janet • Pierre Jones
David Knapp • Andrew Korniej • Alan LoFaso
Holly MacCormick • Josh Marron • Evelyn Martinez
Julio Martinez • Michael Pinell • Mason Roberts
Anthony Sabedra • Fernando Sanchez-Riera • Derrick Scott
Lee Taubeneck • Kimberly Thompson • Ross Uchimura
Laurel Winzler • Sarah Yune • Frank Zepeda

Backstage Personnel

COSTUME SHOP

Jai Alltizer (25), *Costume Shop Manager*
Galen Till (21),

Senior Production Supervisor
Manuel Gutierrez (26),
Production Coordinator
Robyn Marsh, *Costume Supervisor*
Sally Thomas (25), *Head Tailor*
Amy Ashton-Keller (31), *Head Draper*
Nika Cassaro, Emma Lehman (10),
Santiago Suanes (15), *Drapers*
Paula Wheeler (33), *Senior Milliner*
Amy Van Every (41),
Senior Dyer/Painter
Karen Lewis, *Dyer/Painter*
Jersey McDermott (26),

Senior Craftsperson/Shoe Specialist
Edward Fonseca (14), Ralph Hoy,
Kelly Koehn, Kaitlyn Patrick,
Christina Weiland, *Craftpersons*
Kristen Tracy (17), *Assistant Cutter*
Julia Colvard, Taylor Newell, Niko Suits,
First Hand
Victoria Mortimer, *Costume Assistant*
Teddy Rose Baker, Sophia Gallegos,
Shoppers

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Miriam Acosta, Cassandra Carpenter,
Simone Brooks, Karla Fix,
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Ashley Grambow, Kathy Griffith,
Gillian Haratani (13), Aki Hasegawa,
Meg Horan, Arianna B. Jones,
Megan Luby, Sara Morimoto (12),
Mikael Nohai, Jane Smith,
Hannah Velichko, Alexae Visel,
Sarah Ellen Wilson, Robert Whitehurst

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Nicolas Chacon,
Linda Edwards (27)
Edward Fonseca (14)
Lorraine Lewis (13)
Phil Perry (28)
Leona Schrader-Dee
Don Smith (29)
Scott Stewart (25)
Kirsten Tucker (22)
Amber Vo

DRESSERS

Paula Barish,
Kathleen Blake (13), Ash Cable,
Corrida Carr, Kathleen Crowley,
Megan Gulla, Aki Hasegawa,
Claudia Holaday (46), Ralph Hoy,
Michael Kruzich, Jeffery Larsen,
Emma Mueller, Rachell Nichols,
Mark Saladino

WIG, HAIR, AND MAKEUP DEPARTMENT

SENIOR WIG ARTISTS

Erin Hennessy (12)
Maur Sela (10)

WIG ARTISTS

Calli Carvajal
Lindsay Saier

SHOW CALL FOREPERSONS

Sarah Coy
Christina Martin (12)
Lindsay Saier

PRINCIPAL WIG, HAIR, AND MAKEUP ARTISTS

Vanessa Blanchard Lee,
Calli Carvajal, Sarah Coy,
Karalynne Fiebig (12),
Denise Gutierrez (42),
Chri Holmgren-Greene,
Toby Mayer (34), Christina Martin (12),
Gloria Mueller, Naki Mugambi,
Leilani Norman, Y. Sharon Peng,
Lisa Patnoe (34), Lindsay Saier,
Tim Santry (34)

SHOW CALL WIG, HAIR, AND MAKEUP ARTISTS

Shana Astrachan,
Vanessa Blanchard Lee,
Kristen Campbell, Calli Carvajal,
Sarah Coy, Marisela Garcia,
Denise Gutierrez (42),
Erin Hennessy (12),
Chri Holmgren-Greene,
Raegina Joyner, Amber Lauder milk,
Christina Martin (12),
Toby Mayer (34), Gloria Mueller,
Naki Mugambi, Robert Mrazik (19),
Leilani Norman, Lisa Patnoe (34),
Y. Sharon Peng, Jordan Plath,
Lindsay Saier, Maur Sela, Sophia Smith,
Kimberly Virgen

SCENE SHOP

Jay Cazel
Jack Davis
Dennis Forry
Christian Martinez
Dylan Maxson
Loren Patterson
Michael Ramirez
Victor Sanchez (28)

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Lauren Abrams, Jennifer Bennes,
Melissa Ficociello, Katie Wertz,
Sara Wilhelmi

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Jesse Austin
Alberto Beltran
Lucy Briggs
Gabriel Castellani (15),
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Michael Chapman (13), *Key*
Jack Davis
Paul Delatorre (26), *Key*
Jacob Elliott
Hunter Erbach
Tony Garcia
Karla Hargrave
Geoffrey R. Heron (19)
Geoffrey W. Heron (31), *Key*
Philip Heron (23),
Automation and Rigging Foreperson
Ed Joe (21), *Warehouse Foreperson*

Rahgen Hill
Nick Kukielka
Michael Martino
Anna McGriff
Alex Meyer
Ben Miller
Harry Niedzwetzki (33)
Jesse Nugent
John O'Donnell (37), *Key Flyperson*
Enrique Pronio
Michael Ramirez
James Ryan
Michael Ryan
Eila Saarni, *Key*
Gregory Shaff (37), *Key*
Harper Shipley, *Assistant Key*
Cyrus Sindich
Derek Snediker
Sean Walden (14), *Assistant Key*
Randy Walsh (23), *Key*
Sammy Wong

PROPERTY DEPARTMENT

Scott J. Barringer (25), *Key*
Amy Boussard
Christy Carter
Jay Cazel
James Eldredge (21), *Shop Mechanic*
Oris Fry
Tim Heaney
Jane Henderson
Patricia Hewett (18), *Assistant Key*
Myron Seth Isaacs (25), *Key*
Mark Kotschnig (23), *Key*
John Matlock, *Assistant Key*
Baylie Olson
Beth Ozarow (29), *Out of House Key*
Sarah Shores (18), *Shop Mechanic*
Mae Toone
Morgan Womble-Dahl

ELECTRICS DEPARTMENT

Eugene Ahn (12), *Gel Room*
Samir Arora, *Key Projectionist*
John Boatwright (38),
House Head Electrician
Ariel Bott, *Assistant Key Stage Left*
Danielle Colburn
Henry Cotter
Erik Docktor (18), *Projection Programmer*
Amy Domjan, *Layout Electrician*
Mark Gilmore, *Projection Programmer*
Will Grunig (23)
Robert Haycock, *Key Stage Right*
Geoffrey W. Heron (16), *Pyro Technician*
Bernard Honigman (26),
Key Light Board Operator
Karen Jine
Brendan Kierans (12),
Electric Shop Foreperson
Sophie Landau
Maria Mendoza (37), *Projection Coordinator*
Lloyd Murphy, *Key Projectionist*
Baylie Olsen
Jonathan Philpott-Kenny
Glenn Quilici, *Assistant Key Stage Right*
Kevin Quintero
Matthew Reynolds
William Rodriguez
Kirt Siders, *Data Administrator*
Andrew Sproule (26), *Key Stage Left*
Jax Steager,
Assistant Key Light Board Operator

AUDIO DEPARTMENT

Eric Bumgarner
Emad Dajani, *Key*
Christine Dumke
Kimberly Griess, *Key*
Bryan Olson

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Tom Banducci
Ray Gilberti
Doug Hunt
Mitch Kell
Michael Santy
Brian Shimetz
Uwe Willenbacher (17), *Audio Editor*

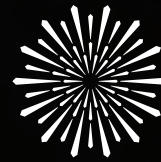
STUDIO TEACHERS

Donnell Barnes, Carolyn Crimley,
Rhona Gordon, Lua Hadar, Martha Harris,
Stacy Heniser, Jamie Keller,
Karen Kindig, Laila Vatanka

WRANGLERS

Marion Agronovsky, Alexandra Armstead,
Gwyneth Hadfield, Kate Juliana,
Jonah Malamud, Haley May,
Eleanor Murphy-Weise

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SCAN TO GIVE



Photo: San Francisco Opera's 2025 production of *Idomeneo* by Cory Weaver.

San Francisco Opera Orchestra



Kay Stern
Concertmaster



Maya Cohon
Associate
Concertmaster



Heidi Wilcox
Assistant
Concertmaster



Jennifer Cho
First Violin



Dawn Harms
First Violin



Mariya Borozina
First Violin



Naoko Nakajima
First Violin



Barbara Riccardi
First Violin



Dian Zhang
First Violin



Leonid Igudesman
First Violin



Jennifer Hsieh
First Violin



Asuka Annie Yano
First Violin



Jeremy Preston
Principal
Second Violin



Martha Simonds
Associate Principal
Second Violin



Beni Shinohara
Assistant Principal
Second Violin



Leslie Ludena
Second Violin



Ka-Yeon Lee
Second Violin



Aya Kiyonaga
Second Violin



Craig Reiss
Second Violin



Carla Maria Rodrigues
Principal
Viola



Joy Fellows
Associate Principal
Viola



Stephen Goist
Acting Assistant
Principal Viola



Natalia Vershilova
Viola



Lindan Burns
Viola



Emily Liu
Viola↑



Elizabeth Prior
Viola↑



Thalia Moore
Associate Principal
Cello



Peter Myers
Assistant Principal
Cello



Nora Pirquet
Acting Assistant
Principal Cello



Emil Miland
Cello



Jung-Hsuan Ko
Cello



Ruth Lane
Cello



Joseph Lescher
Principal
Bass



Jonathan Lancellle
Associate Principal
Bass



Shinji Eshima
Bass

↑ Season Substitute

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA ORCHESTRA CONTINUED



William Wasson
Bass



Julie McKenzie
Principal
Flute



Stephanie McNab
Acting Principal
Flute & Piccolo



Susan Kang
Flute↑



Mingjia Liu
Principal
Oboe



Gabriel Young
Associate Principal
Oboe



Benjamin Brogadir
English Horn



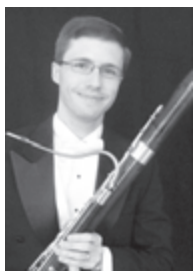
José González Granero
Principal Clarinet



Junghwan Lee
Bass Clarinet↑



Rufus Olivier
Principal
Bassoon



Daniel MacNeill
Bassoon



Shawn Jones
Bassoon/
Contrabassoon↑



Kevin Rivard
Principal
Horn



Phillip Palmore
Horn



Brian McCarty
Associate Principal
Horn



Logan Bryck
Utility Horn



Adam Luftman
Principal
Trumpet



Scott Macomber
Trumpet↑



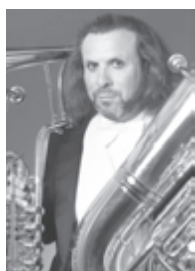
John Pearson
Trumpet



Michael Cox
Acting Principal
Trombone



David Ridge
Principal
Bass Trombone



Zachariah Spellman
Tuba



John Burgardt
Timpani



Patricia Niemi
Acting Principal
Percussion



Victor Avdienko
Percussion↑



Tracy Davis
Orchestra Manager



Carrie Weick
Librarian

Not pictured:

Heeguen Song (Second Violin)↑

Jungin Yang (Principal Cello)

Sean O'Hara (Bass)↑

Michelle Caimotto (Flute)↑

Rebecca Tobin Krissman (Clarinet)↑

Anthony Delivanis (Horn)↑

Samuel Wamhoff (Trombone)↑

Eleanor Kirk (Principal Harp)

Kevin Myers (Orchestra Operations Manager)

↑ Season Substitute

San Francisco Opera Regular Chorus



Nadima Avakian
Soprano



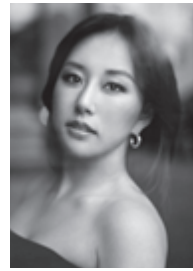
Kathleen Bayler
Soprano



Cheryl Cain
Soprano



Danielle Cheiken
Soprano



Hannah Cho
Soprano



Sara Colburn
Soprano



Crystal Kim
Soprano



Josephine Lee
Soprano



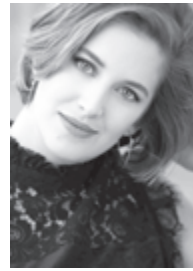
Liesl McPherrin
Soprano



Angela Eden Moser
Soprano



Elisabeth Rom Lucio
Soprano



Jesslyn Thomas
Soprano



Buffy Baggott
Mezzo-Soprano



Janet Campbell
Mezzo-Soprano



Edith Dowd
Mezzo-Soprano



Stella Hannock
Mezzo-Soprano



Silvie Jensen
Mezzo-Soprano



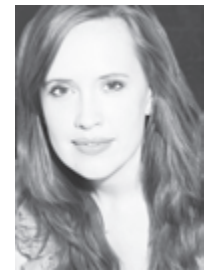
Sally Mouzon
Mezzo-Soprano



Sarah Nadreau
Mezzo-Soprano



Erin Neff
Mezzo-Soprano



**Laurel Cameron
Porter**
Mezzo-Soprano



Whitney Steele
Mezzo-Soprano



Jacque Wilson
Mezzo-Soprano



C. Michael Belle
Tenor



Alan Cochran
Tenor



Kevin Gino
Tenor



Christopher Jackson
Tenor



Michael Jankosky
Tenor



Eric Levintow
Tenor



Antonio Nagore
Tenor



Phillip Pickens
Tenor



Chester Pidduck
Tenor



Jonathan Smucker
Tenor



Andrew Truett
Tenor



William Lee Bryan
Baritone

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA REGULAR CHORUS CONTINUED



Anders Fröhlich
Baritone



John Fulton
Baritone



Harlan Hays
Baritone



Nikolas Nackley
Baritone



Andrew Thomas
Pardini
Baritone



Wilford Kelly
Bass



Bojan Knežević
Bass



William O'Neill
Bass



William Pickersgill
Bass



Samuel Rabinowitz
Bass

San Francisco Opera Corps Dancers



Jamielyn Duggan



Brett Conway



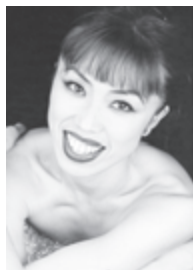
Blanche Hampton



Bryan Ketron
Leave of Absence



Christopher Nachtrab



Chiharu Shibata



Marcos Vedovetto

San Francisco Opera Guild

LEADERSHIP AND STAFF

OFFICERS

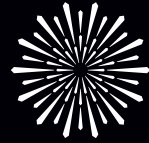
Courtney Labe, *President*
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Jane S. Mudge, *Governance Chair*

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David Gockley

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Caroline Altman, *Director of Education*
Max Morgan-Butcher, *Education & Development Manager*
Celeste Camarena, *Education Program Manager*
Teddy Reich, *Marketing Manager, Events Associate*
Geovanna Navarette, *Special Events Manager*
Siobhan Cullen, *Accounting Associate*



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San Francisco Opera Guild
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Jennifer Bienaime
Jack Calhoun & Trent Norris
Dr. Carolyn Chang
Barry & Simi Chehraz
Katie Colendich
Dodge & Cox
Jerome L. & Thao N. Dodson
Ms. Lynne Edminster & Mr. Brian Atwood
Jeffrey Garelick
Ann & Daniel Girard
Farnoosh Hariri
Jane Hartley
Ms. Jane Inch
Sandra Jamieson
Katie Jarman, *in honor of* Claude Jarman
Maryjo & Todd Kaplan
Curt F. Kirschner
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Karen J. Kubin
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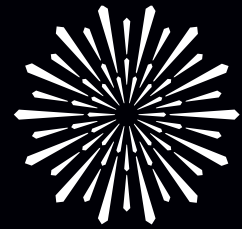
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Journeying to the Extremes of Human Emotion

BY GENERAL DIRECTOR MATTHEW SHILVOCK

"Don't say a word. Let me look at you. See, I'm smiling at you. Smiling and remembering a little boy. My Joe. ... Yes. That's what I'm rememb'ring. I still see him in you, that little boy. I always will. No goodbyes now. Look. I'm still smiling."

These are the words sung by Mrs. Patrick De Rocher, mother to a convicted killer as she says her final farewell to her son before his execution in *Dead Man Walking*. Saying goodbye to a child about to be executed is a situation that hopefully none of us will ever be in, but it stands as an expression of humanity at its most raw, its most vulnerable, its most painful. Whatever one's beliefs about capital punishment, this is a moment of a person tested to the limits, transcending the political, moral or even spiritual. This is a mother saying a last goodbye to her son. A parent having to do the unthinkable.

This reminds me of the visceral, harrowing moments in *Innocence* on our stage in 2024. There we entered into the impossible emotional toll of the parents of a young man who had killed ten students and a teacher. Like the anguish of Mrs. Patrick De Rocher in *Dead Man Walking*, the emotions of these parents are almost impossible to represent. They are too complex, too encumbered with moral dilemma, too fraught with pain. How do we examine compassion for the parents of a killer, let alone the killer themselves?

The opera house is one of the few places where we can explore extreme examples of humans tested to the limit: a "virtual reality" exploration of emotion in ways that can feel intensely real.

It may seem that it is only with recent operatic subjects like *Dead Man Walking* or *Innocence* that we can examine this complex, anguished side of humanity. Certainly, these are subjects that push boundaries in particularly acute ways. But this spotlight on the painful knot of human emotion has been a defining aspect of opera since its inception. In music of prior centuries that is now seen as beautiful and harmonious, it is sometimes easy to lose sight of the grit, the bite, the pain that was there for audiences of its time, and that can still be found today.

Rigoletto's massive monologue, "Cortigiani," in the second act of the opera is a powerful example. It is the expression of a man ostracized by the world, without agency, forced to beg his 'superiors' for the return of the one thing in the world that brings him joy: his only daughter, knowing that she is being abused behind doors that he is not able to enter. It is a monologue that begins full of rage but that morphs into a pained entreaty of a parent at the absolute brink of desperation. Like Mrs. Patrick De Rocher, we see a parent in a completely unthinkable situation, one filled with moral complexity (Rigoletto has made enemies of all those he now entreats), but that ultimately comes down to the primal roar of pain of a parent knowing that their child is being hurt.

Opera allows us behind these extraordinarily private doors of human emotion, and lets us experience, in a space of psychological safety, a little of what it is like to be thrust into the darkest pains of human existence. That is one of the reasons we come back time and time again. In the theater we can put on the mask of tragedy for a few hours, and emerge in a deepened state of empathy for the extremes of what humans must, at times, endure.

The last time we produced *Rigoletto* in 2017, I was joined by a family with three young children, aged 8-12. They asked me before the performance to explain the opera. I quickly found myself tongue-tied, trying to explain to young children what an assassin was; trying to explain the duke's attitude to women. The adult nature of the story became painfully clear! But then I watched these three children watching the opera. They were transfixed and understood it completely. They grappled with these complex, adult emotions at a primal, emotive level and, in that, left with a deeper understanding of the world they were growing into.

The opera stage has the capacity to engender empathy, even in the most harrowing of realities. And, in that, it allows us to explore the farthest reaches of our humanity. 🌱

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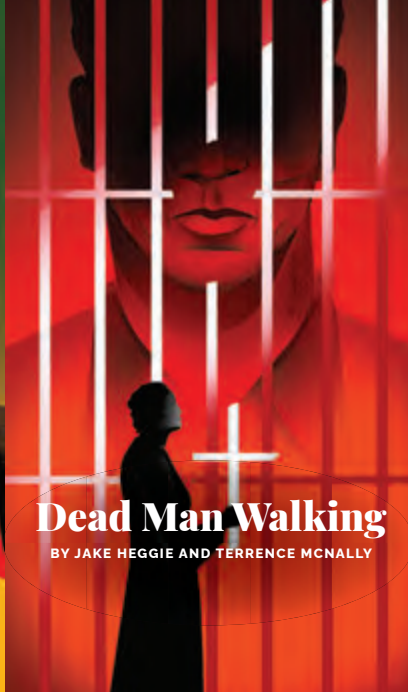
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BY HUANG RUO AND DAVID HENRY HWANG



The Barber of Seville

BY GIOACHINO ROSSINI



Elektra

BY RICHARD STRAUSS



Beethoven & Falla



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