



SAN FRANCISCO OPERA'S SEPTEMBER 14–28 PRESENTATION OF *DEAD MAN WALKING* MARKS 25TH ANNIVERSARY

San Francisco Opera commission by composer Jake Heggie and librettist Terrence McNally, the most performed contemporary opera, returns to the stage where it all began in production directed by Leonard Foglia



Jake Heggie. (photo: James Niebuhr); Scenes from *Dead Man Walking* (photos: Andrew Cioffi/Lyric Opera of Chicago)

Patrick Summers conducts cast featuring Jamie Barton, Ryan McKinny, Susan Graham, Brittany Renee, Rod Gilfry



Patrick Summers (conductor), Jamie Barton (Sister Helen Prejean), Ryan McKinny (Joseph De Rocher), Susan Graham (Mrs. Patrick De Rocher), Brittany Renee (Sister Rose), Rod Gilfry (Owen Hart)

Saturday, September 20 performance will be livestreamed

Sister Helen Prejean, author and activist who inspired the opera, will be joined by prominent faith leaders and death penalty abolitionists, along with Heggie and San Francisco Opera artists for free public events

Tickets available at (415) 864-3330 and [sfopera.com](https://www.sfopera.com)

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (August 20, 2025) — *Dead Man Walking*, the searing opera by San Francisco-based composer **Jake Heggie** and librettist **Terrence McNally**, returns to the War Memorial Opera House stage September 14–28 in a special presentation marking the work's 25th anniversary. The San Francisco Opera commission, which premiered in 2000, has had more than 80 productions worldwide to date, making it the most performed contemporary opera and a benchmark in the history of American opera.

Sister Helen Prejean's best-selling 1993 memoir, *Dead Man Walking*, about her spiritual journey accompanying a condemned man on death row, was the inspiration for the Academy Award-winning film starring Susan Sarandon and the opera. In celebration of the opera's 25th anniversary and to advance discussion of its theme of redemption and the current policies surrounding capital punishment, Sister Helen Prejean will lead two free public events, both featuring Jake Heggie: a program at the Sydney Goldstein Theater (September 10) will showcase prominent faith leaders and death penalty abolition advocates along with San Francisco Opera artists, while a program at San Francisco Public Library's Main Library (September 12) explores the many adaptations of Prejean's powerful memoir with a film screening and discussion.

Award-winning composer **Jake Heggie** began his operatic career with *Dead Man Walking*. Set to a libretto by renowned playwright Terrence McNally (1938–2020), the opera was proclaimed “a masterpiece” (*San Francisco Chronicle*) at its world premiere on October 7, 2000. More recently, the *Chicago Tribune* praised its power to “take us deep into a tragic story in ways that neither a book nor a film can.” Heggie has since expanded the operatic repertoire with numerous works and has been acknowledged as one of the art form's leading creators. Heggie was inducted into the OPERA America Hall of Fame in March 2025, and Musical America named him Composer of the Year (2025).

Heggie said: “This production of *Dead Man Walking* represents one of the most astonishing, full-circle moments of my career. It's hard to believe it was 25 years ago when the opera premiered here to phenomenal acclaim. No one could have predicted the journey it would make, with more than 80 international productions to date. This was all made possible by an inspiring and deeply gratifying collaboration with the great Terrence McNally through the vision and guidance of longtime San Francisco Opera General Director Lotfi Mansouri.”

Shortly after the world premiere of *Dead Man Walking*, a consortium of seven American opera companies collaborated to create a new production directed by **Leonard Foglia** and featuring the work of set designer **Michael McGarty**, costume designer **Jess Goldstein**, lighting designer **Brian Nason**, projection designer **Elaine J. McCarthy** and sound designer **Roger Gans**. This well-traveled vision of the opera, now owned by Lyric Opera of Chicago, comes to the War Memorial Opera House stage for the first time. Foglia, a longtime Heggie collaborator who led the San Francisco Opera

premieres of the composer's *Three Decembers* (2008), *Moby-Dick* (2012) and *It's a Wonderful Life* (2018), directs, aided by associate director **Katrina Bachus**.

Patrick Summers, who conducted the first production of *Dead Man Walking* and has led the premieres of nearly all of Heggie's operas, returns to conduct San Francisco Opera's 25th-anniversary presentation. Summers was the Company's Principal Guest Conductor (1999–2016) and is currently Artistic and Music Director of Houston Grand Opera.

Following her triumphs with San Francisco Opera in works by Bellini, Donizetti, Dvořák and Wagner, **Jamie Barton** stars as Sister Helen Prejean, a portrayal the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* praised as "nuanced ... intriguingly conflicted and tormented." Barton was nominated for a Grammy Award for her 2020 album, *Unexpected Shadows*, a recital of songs by Jake Heggie with the composer at the piano.

Ryan McKinny, the American bass-baritone who made his Company debut in 2017 as Clarence in the world premiere of John Adams and Peter Sellars' *Girls of the Golden West*, brings to San Francisco Opera his celebrated interpretation of death-row inmate Joseph De Rocher, which he has performed with the Metropolitan Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago. "His warmly robust bass-baritone voice makes De Rocher's humanity evident from the start," said the *New York Times*.

Mezzo-soprano **Susan Graham**, the first Sister Helen Prejean, returns to the work as Mrs. Patrick De Rocher (the role originated by legendary mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade). Musical America said of her portrayal: "Her vocal tone was restrained: even in her two big scenes, you were less aware of operatic singing than of human speech. Graham allowed us to experience the character's sorrow unembellished." Graham made her San Francisco Opera debut in 1990 as the goddess Minerva in Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* and has brought numerous indelible portraits to the Company's stage, including the title roles of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* and Handel's *Ariodante* and *Xerxes*, Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier* and Didon in Berlioz's *Les Troyens*.

Brittany Renee, who has appeared with the Company in Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abel's *Omar* and as Musetta in Puccini's *La Bohème*, takes on the role of Sister Helen's confidante, Sister Rose. The part of the prison warden George Benton will be performed by bass **Raymond Aceto**, an artist with many memorable appearances with San Francisco Opera, including Hunding in Wagner's *Die Walküre* and Reverend Olin Blitch in Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*.

The murdered girl's parents, Owen and Kitty Hart, are portrayed by **Rod Gilfry** and current San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow soprano **Caroline Corrales**, respectively. Jade and Howard Boucher, the parents of the murdered boy, will be played by former Adler Fellow mezzo-soprano **Nikola Printz**, who performed an aria from Heggie's opera *Great Scott* at San Francisco Opera's *Pride Concert* in June 2025, and current Adler Fellow tenor **Samuel White**.

Along with *The Dangerous Liaisons* by Conrad Susa and Philip Littell (1994) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* by André Previn and Philip Littell (1998), *Dead Man Walking* was the third in a trio of San Francisco Opera commissions initiated by Lotfi Mansouri, San Francisco Opera's General Director from 1988–2000. Heggie, who was then a member of the Company's public relations department from 1994–1998, had been writing songs for some of the Company's leading artists, including Frederica von Stade, Renée Fleming and Jennifer Larmore. Mansouri commissioned him to write his first opera with Terrence McNally and created a new position for him, Composer-in-Residence, while he and the playwright created the opera that would become *Dead Man Walking*. San Francisco Opera has co-commissioned three subsequent operas from Heggie: *Three Decembers*, *Moby-Dick* and *It's a Wonderful Life*.

Performed in English with English supertitles, the six performances of *Dead Man Walking* are scheduled for September 14 (2 p.m.), 17 (7:30 p.m.), 20 (7:30 p.m.), 23 (7:30 p.m.), 26 (7:30 p.m.), 28 (2 p.m.), 2025.

DEAD MAN WALKING 25TH ANNIVERSARY ANCILLARY EVENTS



Sister Helen Prejean (Photo: Cheryl Gerber); Jake Heggie (Photo: James Niebuhr)

San Francisco Opera is partnering with Sister Helen Prejean's Ministry Against the Death Penalty (MADP), the San Francisco Interfaith Council (SFIC), Lumahai Productions and the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) on events in support of the 25th-anniversary presentation of *Dead Man Walking*. For more information about the ancillary program, visit sfopera.com/dmw-community.

Prejean said: "I'm so glad there are these art forms bringing it out because it's a secret thing. We've executed over 1,600 people. We've gassed them and shot them and lethally injected and electrocuted them, and nobody sees it. But the opera brings it out there, and it takes them on the whole journey. So that's the magic of what we hope for with the opera and the events surrounding it, of connecting the activists with art."

FAITH, LAW & THE DEATH PENALTY

Sydney Goldstein Theater, September 10 at 7 p.m.



Pastor Mike McBride, Susan Shannon, Rabbi Jonathan Singer, Michael Pappas
Sabrina Butler-Smith, Nisha Shah, Natasha Minsker

Hosted by **Sister Helen Prejean**, presented by MADP and SFIC, this free event will feature composer **Jake Heggie** and two panel discussions on the issue of the death penalty from faith and policy perspectives. Faith leader panelists will include **Imam Muhammad Fasih** (San Quentin Islamic Chaplin), **Pastor Mike McBride** (Live Free USA), **Reverend Susan Shannon** (Buddhist Prison ministry) and **Rabbi Jonathan Singer** (Congregation Emanu-El), while **Sabrina Butler-Smith** (Witness to Innocence) who spent nearly three years on death row before her exoneration, **Nisha Shah** (Habeas Corpus Resource Center) and **Natasha Minsker** (California Anti-Death Penalty Coalition) will take part in the policy/legislation panel. Baritone **Ryan McKinny**, who performs the role of death-row inmate Joseph De Rocher in the upcoming run, will join the discussion, and mezzo-soprano **Nikola Printz** and pianist **John Churchwell** will perform Prejean's aria "This Journey" from *Dead Man Walking*. With special thanks to Michael Pappas (SFIC), Elizabeth Zitrin (MADP) and City Arts and Lectures.

AN AFTERNOON WITH SISTER HELEN PREJEAN AND *DEAD MAN WALKING*

Koret Auditorium at San Francisco Public Library Main Library, September 12 at 2 p.m.

This free event, exploring adaptations of *Dead Man Walking*, includes a screening of the 1995 film by Tim Robbins starring Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn, followed by a 4 p.m. discussion with Sister Helen Prejean and Jake Heggie moderated by San Francisco Opera's Ryan Marchand, an audience Q&A, book signing and reception. For more information, visit SFPL's event site [HERE](#).

PAGE TO STAGE: *DEAD MAN WALKING* BOOK CLUB WITH SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY

In partnership with San Francisco Public Library, reader groups will meet for discussions about Sister Helen Prejean's thought-provoking memoir on Wednesday, September 3 (6–7:30 p.m.) at The Nabe and Saturday, September 20 (10:30 a.m.–12 p.m.) at the Richmond Branch. Book Club

participants receive a free copy of *Dead Man Walking* and an invitation to the dress rehearsal of the opera. To register, visit sfopera.com/dec/calendar/page-to-stage-dead-man-walking.

ART EXHIBITION IN THE WAR MEMORIAL OPERA HOUSE LOBBY

An art installation featuring the work of incarcerated artists will be displayed on the North Grand Tier in the Opera House and viewable by ticket holders.

DEAD MAN WALKING AT 25



Scenes from the 2000 premiere of *Dead Man Walking*; Jake Heggie and Frederica von Stade in 2025

Photos: Ken Friedman (left, center); Matthew Washburn (right)

As part of its *Streaming the First Century* initiative, San Francisco Opera presents *Dead Man Walking at 25*, a collection of new interviews with participants from the opera's world premiere. Follow the work's beginnings from the hiring of Jake Heggie in the Company's Public Relations department in 1994 to the opera's star-studded opening on October 7, 2000 through the stories of Jake Heggie, Frederica von Stade, Susan Graham, Catherine Cook, Patrick Summers, Kip Cranna, Lori Harrison and others. This oral history of a modern operatic masterpiece will be posted before the opening of *Dead Man Walking* at sfopera.com/deadmanwalking25.

LIVESTREAM: DEAD MAN WALKING, Saturday, September 20

The Saturday, September 20 performance of *Dead Man Walking* will be livestreamed at 7:30 p.m. PT. The opera will also be available to watch on demand for 48 hours, beginning on Sunday, September 21 at 10 a.m. PT. Tickets for the livestream and limited on-demand viewing are \$25. For tickets and more information about livestreams, visit sfopera.com/digital.

PRE-OPERA TALKS

55 minutes before each performance of *Dead Man Walking*, San Francisco Opera Dramaturg Emeritus Dr. Clifford "Kip" Cranna and composer Jake Heggie will discuss the opera in a 20-minute conversation for ticketholders. An audio recording of the talk will be made available at sfopera.com/deadmanwalking.

TICKETS AND INFORMATION

Tickets for *Dead Man Walking* are priced from \$29 to \$447. Full-Series subscriptions start at \$139 (6 productions) or \$68 for Half Series (2–4 productions). A \$2 per-ticket facility fee is included in Balcony 1, 2 and 3 zone prices; all other zones include a \$3 per-ticket facility fee. For tickets and more information, contact the San Francisco Opera Box Office at 301 Van Ness Avenue, call (415) 864-3330 or visit at sfopera.com. For information about subscriber benefits and special series subscriptions, including the Student & Teacher Series offering 50% off select Full, Half and Design Your Own Series, visit sfopera.com/subscribe.

The War Memorial Opera House is located at 301 Van Ness Avenue. Patrons are encouraged to use public transportation to attend San Francisco Opera performances. The War Memorial Opera House is within walking distance of the Civic Center BART/Muni Station and near numerous bus lines, including 5, 21, 49 and F Market Street. For further public transportation information, visit bart.gov and sfmta.com.

Gifts of all sizes help create San Francisco Opera's programs and are much appreciated. To donate visit sfopera.com/donate.

All casting, programs, schedules and ticket prices are subject to change. For further information about San Francisco Opera's 2025–26 Season, visit sfopera.com.

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DEAD MAN WALKING CASTING AND CALENDAR

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

All performances take place at the War Memorial Opera House (301 Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco)

25TH ANNIVERSARY PRESENTATION

DEAD MAN WALKING by composer Jake Heggie and librettist Terrence McNally

September 14 (2 p.m.), 17 (7:30 p.m.), 20 (7:30 p.m.), 23 (7:30 p.m.), 26 (7:30 p.m.), 28 (2 p.m.), 2025

Commissioned by San Francisco Opera

Production owned by Lyric Opera of Chicago, originally created by Opera Pacific, Cincinnati Opera, New York City Opera, Austin Lyric Opera, Michigan Opera, Pittsburgh Opera and Baltimore Opera

Based on the book by Sister Helen Prejean

Approximate running time: 2 hours, 52 minutes with one intermission

Performed in English with English supertitles

World Premiere:

San Francisco Opera; October 7, 2000

Cast:

Sister Helen Prejean
Joseph De Rocher
Mrs. Patrick De Rocher
Sister Rose
Owen Hart
Kitty Hart
George Benton
Father Grenville
Howard Boucher
Jade Boucher
Motorcycle Cop
Prison Guard #1
Prison Guard #2
Older Brother to Joseph
Younger Brother to Joseph
Teenage Girl
Teenage Boy
Paralegal
Sister Catherine
Sister Lillianne
First Mother
Mrs. Charlton
Jimmy Charlton
Anthony De Rocher
First Inmate
Second Inmate
Third Inmate
Fourth Inmate
Fifth Inmate

Jamie Barton
 Ryan McKinny
 Susan Graham+
 Brittany Renee♪
 Rod Gilfry
 Caroline Corrales♪‡+
 Raymond Aceto
 Chad Shelton
 Samuel White♪‡+
 Nikola Printz♪‡+
 Olivier Zerouali♪‡+
 Samuel Kidd♪‡+
 Philip Skinner♪‡+
 Ryan Torres*♪
 Jackson Horton*♪
 Anna Kosiarek*♪
 Chris Costanz*♪
 Mary Hoskins♪‡+
 Danielle Cheiken*♪
 Whitney Steele♪
 Sally Mouzon♪
 Liesl McPherrin♪
 Logan Cook*♪
 Zachary Cowan*♪
 Kevin Gino♪
 William Lee Bryan♪
 Chester Pidduck♪
 John Fulton♪
 Nikolas Nackley♪

Creative Team:

Conductor
Production
Associate Director
Set Designer
Costume Designer
Lighting Designer
Projection Designer
Sound Designer
Chorus Director
Fight Director

Patrick Summers+
 Leonard Foglia
 Katrina Bachus*
 Michael McGarty*
 Jess Goldstein
 Brian Nason
 Elaine J. McCarthy
 Roger Gans
 John Keene
 Dave Maier

San Francisco Opera Orchestra, Chorus and Dance Corps

DEAD MAN WALKING 25TH ANNIVERSARY ANCILLARY EVENTS

Faith, Law & the Death Penalty

Wednesday, September 10 at 7 p.m. Free admission

Sydney Goldstein Theater (275 Hayes Street, San Francisco)

Presented by Sister Helen Prejean's Ministry Against the Death Penalty (MADP) and the San Francisco Interfaith Council (SFIC), co-produced by San Francisco Opera and Lumahai Productions, this thought-provoking program hosted by Sister Helen Prejean explores the issue of the death penalty from both faith-based and policy/legislation perspectives. Faith leader panelists will include Imam Muhammad Fasih (San Quentin Islamic Chaplin), Pastor Mike McBride (Live Free USA), Reverend Susan Shannon (Buddhist Prison Ministry), and Rabbi Jonathan Singer (Congregation Emanu-El), while Sabrina Butler-Smith (Witness to Innocence), who spent nearly three years on death row before her exoneration, Nisha Shah (Habeas Corpus Resource Center) and Natasha Minsker (California Anti-Death Penalty Coalition) will take part in the policy/legislation panel. Composer Jake Heggie and baritone Ryan McKinny, who plays the role of death-row inmate Joseph De Rocher, will speak and mezzo-soprano Nikola Printz and pianist John Churchwell will perform an aria from the opera. Visit sfopera.com/dmw-community.

An Afternoon with Sister Helen Prejean and *Dead Man Walking*. Featuring composer Jake Heggie
Friday, September 12, 2–6 p.m. (film screening at 2 p.m., discussion at 4 p.m.) Free admission
Koret Auditorium, San Francisco Public Library Main Library (100 Larkin St., San Francisco)

This free program, presented by San Francisco Public Library and San Francisco Opera and produced with Lumahai Productions, opens with a screening of the Academy Award-winning 1995 film starring Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn. Sister Helen Prejean will share thoughts about her life and work, and composer Jake Heggie will offer clips from the opera. The event, hosted by San Francisco Opera's Ryan Marchand, will include an audience Q&A and book signing, along with a preview of the forthcoming graphic novel version of *Dead Man Walking*, to be released by Random House on October 28. For more information, visit SFPL's event page [HERE](#).

Page to Stage: *Dead Man Walking* Book Club with San Francisco Public Library

Wednesday, September 3, 6-7:30 p.m., The Nabe, 953 De Haro Street, San Francisco

Saturday, September 20, 10:30 a.m.-12 p.m., Richmond Branch, 351 9th Avenue

In partnership with San Francisco Public Library, reader groups will meet for discussions about Sister Helen Prejean's thought-provoking memoir on Wednesday, September 3 (6–7:30 p.m.) at The Nabe and Saturday, September 20 (10:30 a.m.–12 p.m.) at the Richmond Branch. Book Club participants receive a free copy of *Dead Man Walking* and an invitation to the dress rehearsal of the opera. To register, visit sfopera.com/dec/calendar/page-to-stage-dead-man-walking.

DEAD MAN WALKING AT 25

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San Francisco Opera is sponsored, in part, by Julie Dickson, Jerome & Thao Dodson, Dagmar Dolby, Bertie Bialek Elliott, The Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation for the Arts, Louise Gund, John A. & Cynthia Fry Gunn, Franklin & Catherine Johnson, Edmund W. & Jeannik Méquet Littlefield Fund, Bernard & Barbro Osher, Marieke & Jeff Rothschild, Jan Shrem & Maria Manetti Shrem, Dianne & Tad Taube, Phyllis C. Wattis Endowment Funds, Diane B. Wilsey, Barbara A. Wolfe, and two anonymous donors.

Dead Man Walking is made possible, in part, by: The Phyllis C. Wattis Fund for New Productions, Marcia Barinaga & Corey Goodman, Jerome & Thao Dodson, Keith & Priscilla Geeslin, Bernard & Barbro Osher, Denise Littlefield Sobel and Dianne & Tad Taube. Patrick Summers' appearance is made possible by the Jan Shrem & Maria Manetti Shrem Conductors Fund.

OperaVision high-definition projection screens featured in the upper Balcony level, is made possible by the Taube Media Suite.

San Francisco Opera livestreams are made possible, in part, by George & Leslie Hume.

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Yamaha is the official piano of San Francisco Opera.

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San Francisco Opera is a member of



PRESS PHOTOS: High-resolution, downloadable artist headshots and production images for *Dead Man Walking* are available at sfopera.com/press.

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