



COMPOSER JAKE HEGGIE AWARDED SAN FRANCISCO OPERA MEDAL



Composer Jake Heggie wearing the San Francisco Opera Medal backstage; Heggie bows after the September 14 performance of *Dead Man Walking*. Photos: Matthew Washburn/San Francisco Opera

Onstage presentation followed September 14 opening of *Dead Man Walking*

San Francisco Opera's 25th-anniversary presentation of Heggie's work, the most performed contemporary American opera, continues through September 28

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (September 16, 2025) — Immediately following the September 14 opening performance of *Dead Man Walking*, composer Jake Heggie was presented with the San Francisco Opera Medal by Tad and Dianne Taube General Director Matthew Shilvock. At this performance marking the 25th anniversary of the premiere of *Dead Man Walking*, Heggie's first opera created with playwright Terrence McNally (1938–2020) which is the most frequently performed contemporary American opera, the award-winning composer and San Francisco resident accepted the Company's highest award.

Shilvock said: "25 years ago, this theater witnessed a courageous inflection point for American opera with the premiere of the extraordinary, powerful and insightful opera we just witnessed. Inspired by Sister Helen [Prejean]'s journey of faith, Jake Heggie showed how the most intense contemporary experiences can, and should, be lenses through which we examine humanity on the opera stage. Jake, for artistry that uplifts the consciousness of each of us as individuals and the consciousness of our collective society, for your humanity that inspires us to move through this world with grace and compassion, and for your enduring legacy on this stage, we are very proud to present you with the San Francisco Opera Medal."

Addressing the audience, Heggie said: "Thank you for welcoming me in and giving me a home in this extraordinary, electric place of possibility ... this sacred place of dreams. Thank you to all of these amazing people on the stage, in the orchestra, the chorus, front of house, back of house, upstage, downstage and everywhere in this building. Most of all I want to thank all of you here today for showing up as a community in the opera house ... please keep showing up, bring more people in, bring young people in—there's room in this magic place for everyone. And we need this community desperately."

Heggie joined San Francisco Opera in 1994 as a writer in the public relations department. During that time, he composed songs that were performed by some of the Company's artists, including Frederica von Stade, Renée Fleming, Jennifer Larmore and Bryn Terfel. San Francisco Opera's then General Director Lotfi Mansouri recognized Heggie's talent and commissioned him to write his first opera. Under the title of Composer-in-Residence from 1998–2000, Heggie worked on *Dead Man Walking* with McNally. Their collaboration would be proclaimed "a masterpiece" (*San Francisco Chronicle*) at its October 7, 2000 world premiere. Over the past 25 years, *Dead Man Walking* has had more than 80 international productions and Heggie has become one of the art form's leading creative voices. He has composed ten operas, more than 300 songs, and numerous choral, chamber and orchestral works. In March 2025, Heggie was inducted into the OPERA America Hall of Fame and Musical America named him 2025 Composer of the Year.

Since the premiere of *Dead Man Walking*, San Francisco Opera has co-commissioned three additional operas from Heggie: *Three Decembers* (2008), *Moby-Dick* (2010) and *It's a Wonderful Life* (2016), and the Merola Opera Program commissioned *If I Were You* (2019). In the fall of 2025, Heggie joined the composition faculty of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

Remaining performances of San Francisco Opera's 25th-anniversary presentation of *Dead Man Walking* at the War Memorial Opera House are scheduled for September 17 (7:30 p.m.), 20 (7:30 p.m.), 23 (7:30 p.m.), 26 (7:30 p.m.) and 28 (2 p.m.). Visit sfopera.com/deadmanwalking.

ABOUT THE SAN FRANCISCO OPERA MEDAL

Inaugurated in 1970 by former General Director Kurt Herbert Adler, the San Francisco Opera Medal is awarded at the discretion of the Company for artistic integrity and distinguished service to San Francisco Opera over an extended period of time. The Opera Medal is the Company's highest honor and has been awarded to vocal soloists, including Frederica von Stade, Susan Graham and Simon Estes; conductors Patrick Summers, Donald Runnicles and Nicola Luisotti; composer John Adams; orchestra musicians Zaven Melikian and David Kadarauch; and crew members, such as head carpenter Michael Kane, scenic artist Jay Kotcher and head of properties Lori Harrison.

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PRESS PHOTOS: Images Jake Heggie receiving the Opera Medal and artist headshots and production photos for *Dead Man Walking* are available at sfopera.com/press.

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