

JAKE HEGGIE / LIBRETTO BY TERENCE McNALLY

# DEAD MAN WALKING

CONDUCTOR  
Yannick Nézet-Séguin

PRODUCTION  
Ivo van Hove

SET AND LIGHTING DESIGNER  
Jan Versweyveld

COSTUME DESIGNER  
An D'Huys

PROJECTION DESIGNER  
Christopher Ash

SOUND DESIGNER  
Tom Gibbons

MARIA MANETTI SHREM  
GENERAL MANAGER  
Peter Gelb

JEANETTE LERMAN-NEUBAUER  
MUSIC DIRECTOR  
Yannick Nézet-Séguin

Opera in Two Acts by Jake Heggie

Libretto by Terrence McNally

Based on the Book by Sister Helen Prejean

Friday, October 6, 2023  
8:00–11:05PM

New Production

The production of *Dead Man Walking* was made possible by a generous gift from **C. Graham Berwind, III**; the **Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation**; **Ted Snowden and Duffy Violante**, in memory of **Terrence McNally**; and **Mrs. Diane B. Wilsey**

Additional support was received from Franci Neely; Judy and Jim Pohlman; Denise Littlefield Sobel, in memory of Phyllis Cannon Wattis; and The H.M. Agnes Hsu-Tang, Ph.D. and Oscar Tang Endowment Fund

Commissioned by San Francisco Opera

*Dead Man Walking* is part of the **Neubauer Family Foundation New Works Initiative**

Throughout the 2023–24 season, the Met continues to honor Ukraine and its brave citizens as they fight to defend their country and its cultural heritage.

# The Metropolitan Opera

2023-24 SEASON

The fourth Metropolitan Opera performance of  
JAKE HEGGIE'S

## DEAD MAN WALKING

CONDUCTOR

Yannick Nézet-Séguin

IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

SISTER HELEN PREJEAN

Joyce DiDonato

SISTER ROSE

Latonia Moore

MOTHER

Helena Brown

SISTER LILLIANNE

Briana Hunter

SISTER CATHERINE

Magdalena Kuźma\*\*

JIMMY

Matteo Omoso Castro

MRS. CHARLTON

Alexa Jarvis

MOTORCYCLE COP

Justin Austin

FATHER GRENVILLE

Chad Shelton

WARDEN GEORGE BENTON

Raymond Aceto\*

PRISON GUARDS

Christopher Job

John Hancock

INMATES

Patrick Miller

Jonathan Scott

Earle Patriarco

Ross Benoiel

Tyler Simpson

JOSEPH DE ROCHER

Ryan McKinny

PARALEGAL

Regan Sims

OLDER BROTHER

Mark Joseph Mitrano

MRS. PATRICK DE ROCHER

Susan Graham

OWEN HART

Rod Gilfry

JADE BOUCHER

Krysty Swann

KITTY HART

Wendy Bryn Harmer\*

HOWARD BOUCHER

Chauncey Packer

YOUNGER BROTHER

Jonah Mussolino

This performance is  
being broadcast live  
on Metropolitan  
Opera Radio on  
SiriusXM channel 355.

Friday, October 6, 2023, 8:00–11:05PM

C. Graham Berwind, III Chorus Master Donald Palumbo  
Musical Preparation Caren Levine,\* Jonathan C. Kelly,  
Steven Osgood, Bryan Wagorn,\* Katelan Trần Terrell,\*  
and Lynn Baker

Associate Director Marcus Shields

Assistant Stage Directors Doug Scholz-Carlson and  
Paula Williams

Assistant Set Designer Dan Soule

Assistant Lighting Designers François Thouret and  
Ethan Steimel

Assistant Projection Designer Brian McMullen

Video Content Production N+N Films

Children's Chorus Young People's Chorus of New York City;  
Francisco J. Núñez, Artistic Director and Founder  
Emma H. Sway, Assistant Conductor

Fight Director Drew Leary

Associate Fight Director Chris Dumont

Intimacy Direction Doug Scholz-Carlson

English Diction Coach Lynn Baker

Prompter Caren Levine\*

Met Titles Michael Panayos

Additional Casting Tara Rubin, CSA, and  
Spencer Gualdoni, CSA

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Department and The Costume Shop, Chicago

Wigs and makeup constructed and executed by Metropolitan  
Opera Wig and Makeup Department

**This production uses haze effects.**

This performance is made possible in part by public funds from  
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Before the performance begins, please switch off cell phones  
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#### Met Titles

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press the red button once again. If you have questions, please ask an  
usher at intermission.

# Synopsis

## Prologue

Joseph and Anthony De Rocher brutally murder two teenagers.

## Act I

In a poor New Orleans school, Sister Helen and Sister Rose teach a hymn to a group of children. Helen is distracted as she thinks about her plan to visit Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola where her new pen pal, a death-row inmate named Joseph De Rocher, has asked her to visit. Against Rose's advice, Helen makes the long drive to Angola and ponders the momentous step that she is taking. A cop stops her for speeding but lets her off with a warning, asking her to pray for his sick mother. As she resumes her journey, she prays for guidance.

When she arrives, Helen is greeted by the prison chaplain, Father Grenville. On the way to his office, they see inmates engaged in a rough game of basketball. Helen and Grenville then have a tense meeting in which the chaplain angrily warns her that she is wasting her time, as Joseph is beyond anyone's help. The prison warden arrives and tells her that Joseph is likely to ask her to become his spiritual advisor to help prepare him for his execution. As she walks to the death-row section of the prison, 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. Helen calls his bluff, and Joseph admits his fear. He requests she be his spiritual advisor, and both acknowledge that they can't do it alone. Joseph asks her to accompany his mother to the Pardon Board hearing, and Helen agrees.

In a courtroom setting, the frightened Mrs. De Rocher does her best to plead for her son's life: She is a small woman in the face of enormous hostility. During her testimony, Owen Hart, the father of the murdered teenage girl, explodes with anger and recounts the grisly details of his daughter's murder. In anguish, Joseph's mother responds that another killing cannot undo what has been done. After the hearing, 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.

Back in the visiting room, Helen tells Joe that an appeal has been made to the governor. Angered by his selfishness, she urges him to acknowledge his guilt and seek forgiveness, but he sees no hope and blames his brother for the murders. The warden appears suddenly and insists that 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 clutter her mind. The warden tells her that the governor has turned down the appeal: "Joseph De Rocher is a dead man." The voices in her head grow louder, and Helen faints.

### *Intermission* (AT APPROXIMATELY 9:25PM)

## Act II

Joseph is counting pushups when the warden comes to tell him that his execution date has been set: August 4, midnight. Alone, Joseph expresses feelings about his impending death, Sister Helen, and his victims.

Helen awakens from a nightmare about Joseph and the murdered teenagers. Rose comforts her and helps her admit that she still has to find the strength to forgive Joseph herself, just as mothers forgive their children's failings.

On the night of Joseph's execution, Helen tells him about seeing Elvis Presley in person when she was a girl. Somehow, their shared love of Elvis opens a door between them, and they are able to laugh as friends. She once more urges Joseph to admit his guilt and find forgiveness. The warden announces that Joseph's family has come to see him for the last time. Joseph has a tearful farewell with his mother and two younger brothers. He begs his mother to forgive him, but she says that she believes what he has always told her: that he is innocent and there is nothing to forgive. Mrs. De Rocher seeks comfort in her recollections of Joseph's innocent childhood. 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 have arrived to witness the execution. They upbraid Helen for siding with a killer, rejecting her words of consolation. Only Owen Hart voices doubts about the value of the execution. Helen offers him friendship and promises to visit.

After the guards prepare Joseph for execution, Helen is alone with him one last time. In the few moments remaining, Helen begs him to tell the truth and promises that she will be the face of love for him when he dies.

The warden calls out, “dead man walking.” As he escorts Joseph to the execution chamber, Father Grenville intones the Lord’s Prayer, echoed by the voices of inmates, nuns, guards, and parents. Helen remains close to Joseph, reading to him from the Bible. When they reach the chamber, she is barred from going any further. Joseph and Helen exchange an emotional goodbye. She reminds him to look for her as she takes her place with the others in the viewing room. In silence, with only his heartbeat audible, the lethal injection is administered. After his death, the witnesses leave, and Helen is alone with Joseph. One last time, she sings her hymn: “He will gather us around.”

—Kip Cranna

**Content warning: Please be advised that tonight’s performance includes video depicting a rape and two murders, as well as the simulated execution of a prisoner by lethal injection.**



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Jake Heggie

# Dead Man Walking

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*Premiere: San Francisco Opera, 2000*

The most widely performed new opera of the last two decades, *Dead Man Walking* is adapted from the groundbreaking memoir by Sister Helen Prejean, which also inspired the hugely successful and culturally significant film directed by Tim Robbins. The story concerns Prejean's introduction to the world of capital punishment, first as a spiritual advisor to a single inmate and then slowly, inexorably, as an advocate on behalf of all individuals condemned to death. What made the book and film capture national and global attention was precisely what made the subject matter a natural candidate for the operatic stage—the moral complexity and deep nuance of its themes and characters. In converting the source material into a compelling piece of theater, composer Jake Heggie and librettist Terrence McNally conflated the two main inmates discussed in the book into one fictional character, Joseph De Rocher, and Heggie created a score that recalls Sister Helen's prose and her advocacy style: direct, unaffected, and unflinchingly honest—but not without a deep understanding of the heart and humanity inside each one of us.

### *The Creators*

Jake Heggie (b. 1961) is an American composer known for his orchestral and choral work, his collaborations with a wide variety of artists, and especially for his operas, including *Dead Man Walking*, *Moby-Dick* (2010), and *It's a Wonderful Life* (2016). Librettist Terrence McNally (1938–2020) was a leading American playwright, screenwriter, and winner of numerous Tony and Drama Desk Awards for such plays as *Love! Valour! Compassion!* (1995) and the musicals *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1993) and *Ragtime* (1998). His dedication to opera was apparent in his plays *The Lisbon Traviata* (1989) and *Master Class* (1995), as well as his appearances on the Opera Quiz during the Met's Saturday Matinee Radio Broadcasts. Sister Helen Prejean (b. 1939) became a nun in the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph at age 18 and began her ministry to convicts awaiting execution in 1982. She chronicled those early experiences in the book *Dead Man Walking* and later published *River of Fire: My Spiritual Journey* (2019), which details her awakening to Christian social-justice doctrine.

### *The Setting*

While based on real-life events from the late 1970s and early 1980s, Heggie's opera is more generally set in contemporary times, as questions about the value

and morality of the death penalty remain relevant. Nonetheless, the locations evoke actual places from Prejean's life: Hope House, a mission in a very poor neighborhood of New Orleans; the long road out to Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola; and the prison itself, which remains the largest maximum-security facility in the United States and is home to the state's death row.

### *The Music*

In depicting this quintessentially American story, Heggie composed a score immersed in an American musical vernacular built around the characters and their inner conflicts, rather than an overt debate about capital punishment. The role of Sister Helen is scored for a lyric mezzo-soprano, with a lower tessitura depicting the character's essential earthiness but also calling upon the singer's upper range to express the character's idealism. Joseph De Rocher's music initially depicts him as a hardened criminal—with jagged, curt phrases—but gradually reveals his fears, fragility, and inherent humanity. Both roles require classic operatic vocalism, nowhere more than in their climactic Act II duet, as they relive the details of Joseph's horrific crimes and the resulting emotions. The important role of Mrs. De Rocher, Joseph's mother, was composed for a mezzo-soprano who could convey deep pathos in her tone as well as being able to express both the text and subtext in her music. The score, however, does not stop at character portrayals: Ambient music plays a large role as well, including songs on a car radio, rock 'n' roll in the style of Elvis Presley, and a traditional-sounding hymn (an invention of the composer's) whose impact changes when heard in different treatments—a joyous celebration when sung by a choir of schoolchildren but a profound meditation when intoned a cappella by Sister Helen at the opera's close.

### *Met History*

*Dead Man Walking* has its company premiere to open the 2023–24 season. Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin leads a new production by Ivo van Hove that stars Joyce DiDonato as Sister Helen Prejean, Ryan McKinny as Joseph De Rocher, Latonia Moore as Sister Rose, and Susan Graham—who originated the role of Sister Helen in the work's world premiere—as De Rocher's mother.



## A Note from the Composer

When Terrence McNally and I first met in 1996 to discuss a possible opera collaboration, it was a comedy the producer had in mind: something light and celebratory for the millennium. Being virtually unknown as a composer, with this incredible opportunity placed before me, I was hardly in a position to disagree with Lotfi Mansouri, San Francisco Opera's general director. Terrence, however, was. And he did. He couldn't have been less interested in such a project.

With Terrence's famous passion for opera and my devotion to composing for the operatic voice, Lotfi believed that this collaboration must happen. So he removed the mandate of comedy. In mid-1997 in San Francisco, Terrence and I sat down to lunch, and he brought out a list of ten ideas, only one of which he really wanted to do. He wouldn't tell me which it was. We both had to feel it. He started reading the list: *Dead Man Walking*.

The hair on the back of my neck stood up, and I immediately started to feel music. This was the story. He continued reading, but to this day, I can't remember anything else he had on the list because I was already figuring out how *Dead Man Walking* would sound. What kind of architecture would the music have? What kinds of musical motifs? The range of characters and their transformations was incredible. There would be room for large ensembles and great possibilities to build emotional tension, to find transcendence in musical and theatrical terms. Fortunately, that was the idea Terrence was most enthusiastic about, too.

Thanks to Tim Robbins's brilliant movie, starring Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn, Sister Helen's story was in the popular psyche and national dialogue. The question wasn't "what is that story?"—it was "how will they put that story on the stage?" A great place to begin.

Why is *Dead Man Walking* so compelling? Sister Helen Prejean, a Louisiana nun, becomes the spiritual advisor to a convicted murderer on death row and accompanies him to his execution. She experiences a journey most of us can't imagine and witnesses a level of grief that even she hadn't imagined. Parents. Children. Families. Torn apart. Amidst all the grief, tragedy, loss, and anger, it is love that transcends, unites, inspires and redeems. Very operatic stuff.

We wanted our opera to be a contemporary American drama. *Dead Man Walking* is a story of our time, but also timeless—a distinctly American story with universal resonance. It makes sense for people to sing in a drama like this. The emotion is big enough to fill an opera house, yet the story is incredibly intimate. It takes us deep into the most difficult struggles we can experience, and to places that only intensify with music. The more we talked about it, the more it seemed like an opera just waiting for the music.

We decided first that the opera wouldn't be a documentary or a biography. It would also not be a polemic or "soapbox" opera pushing a political agenda.

## A Note from the Composer CONTINUED

We would go from the spirit of the book, seeking to tell the emotional journey of the story honestly without preaching, allowing people to make up their own minds.

Supportive and enthusiastic from the start, Sister Helen allowed us to do whatever was needed for her story to work on stage, with only one mandate: that it remain a story of redemption. Right before the announcement of the project, she called me and said in a thick Louisiana accent: "When they called and told me that San Francisco wanted my permission to make an opera out of *Dead Man Walking*, I said, 'Well 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."

Why is Sister Helen such an operatic character? Against the enormous background of the prison system, death row, and a man convicted of a monstrous crime, there is this one extraordinary woman and her faith: her belief in the individual dignity of every person on earth. She travels this path as a kind of "everyman," and we go along: from her work with children in the projects to meeting the convicted killer, then his family, then the families of the murder victims, to an execution chamber, all propelling her to a place of spiritual crisis and ultimate resolution. We learn about it through her eyes as we walk with her. It puts all of us to the test. How much could I take? How far could I go? What are my convictions?

It's this that makes the characters operatic, for they're all regular folks thrown into a tornado, being tested, strained, and pushed to the edge. The story puts a human face on capital punishment. It's no longer a question one can consider in the abstract while watching television or reading the paper. Real lives are at stake at every turn in this story.

One of Terrence's most brilliant theatrical strokes was to have the crime depicted clearly at the beginning of the opera: The audience sees what happens and knows who did it. His guilt is unquestionable. Now, what do we do? Where do we stand?

He told me that he intended to write a play, creating language and situations that would inspire music. He said that the story is everything, but the music must lead, and he would do whatever he could to serve that. If the music took me in a certain direction, I should follow it. If the current words didn't work for me, I could add my own, checking with him later. It's the most generous, gratifying collaboration a theater composer could hope for. Another goal was to explore a medium that was neither traditional theater nor traditional opera, but a music drama, an opera musical, opera theater, or perhaps finally, American opera theater.

My compositional voice is based primarily on direct emotional portraits of characters. I wanted clear melodic and rhythmic motifs to propel a constantly

moving tide of emotion with lyricism, without alienating the characters or the audience. The architecture was clear, too: a building of layers throughout Act I—a long crescendo to the point where Sister Helen faints, overwhelmed by the emotional intensity and physical demands made of her. Act II, a gradual stripping away of layers to reveal the essence of what is at stake: life and love. Terrence conceived a remarkable architecture that begins with outrage at a brutal murder—and ends with another murder, this one sanctioned by law.

Since the San Francisco Opera premiere in October of 2000, *Dead Man Walking* has received 75 international productions, more than 400 performances, by large and small opera companies, conservatories and music schools on five continents. New casts, visions, and productions continue to bring fresh perspectives to the opera. But it is Sister Helen's compelling journey that continues to capture the imagination. Our opera, hopefully, continues to take people right along with her.

—Jake Heggie

## Bravo, Maestro!

The Met recently announced that its esteemed Chorus Master, Donald Palumbo, will step down with the close of the 2023–24 season. Maestro Palumbo joined the Met in 2006 and, in the 17 years since, has elevated the ensemble's musicmaking to new heights, preparing them for nearly 25 productions each season. As a testament to his achievement, the Met Chorus was also named Best Chorus at the 2021 International Opera Awards. And while he will conclude his full-time duties in the spring, Palumbo still plans to return in future seasons to work on select operas.

In honor of Palumbo's illustrious Met career, Board Vice President and Chairman of the Executive Committee C. Graham Berwind, III has made a generous donation to name the Chorus Master position, which will now be known as the C. Graham Berwind, III Chorus Master. "Donald's contribution to the Met has been truly extraordinary," says Berwind. "His musical leadership and dedication has resulted in the world-class opera chorus we are privileged to hear night after night. I am delighted to honor him as he embarks on his last season as Chorus Master."



# An Excerpt from *Dead Man Walking*

by Sister Helen Prejean

Pat is scheduled for execution on Friday, August 19. That really means the evening of Thursday the eighteenth, because the execution is scheduled for just after midnight. I go to visit him on Wednesday the seventeenth. Warden Ross Maggio has granted me a special four-hour visit. Just before entering the prison I use the public telephone outside the gates to call the Coalition office to see if perhaps the courts have issued a stay of execution. Execution is about forty hours away. They have not yet moved him to the death house, where the electric chair is located about five miles deep inside the prison.

Pat looks thin, sallow. He has dark circles under his eyes. He has not been able to keep his food down and has lost thirty pounds in two weeks. He keeps going on coffee and cigarettes.

"My stuff is packed, ready to go," he tells me when I walk in. Any minute the prison authorities might summon him to move to the death house. He has packed what they allow him to bring: a toothbrush and toothpaste, a change of underwear, cigarettes, his Bible, his address book, some stationery and a ballpoint pen. No radio. Music stirs emotions, and prison authorities want as little emotion as possible in this process. There will be a television for him to watch. There will be a telephone on the wall near his cell from which he can make collect calls. Some men on the Row have recently made this move to the death house, but they have all come back alive, receiving stays of execution from the courts. There hasn't been an execution in Louisiana since June 1961.

I tell him that I have just spoken with the Prison Coalition by phone and Tom Dybdahl, who has replaced Chava, has told me to assure him that his attorney has filed his petition and he will surely get a stay from the courts any minute now. I tell him I will visit with him for a couple of hours, and if by then word of a stay has not come, I will ask the major to let me use the phone in his office to call the Coalition office again.

I hope Tom knows what he is talking about. I know nothing of legal issues. I'm practicing blind faith that the attorney knows what he's doing.

"How sure are you about the stay?" I had asked Tom. "Ninety-five percent sure," he had said. That reassures me. But he had also said "You're never absolutely sure about what the courts will do." How does one deal with this kind of waiting? How keep one's poise, one's sanity? Even if he had said 99.9 percent sure, there's that one tenth of 1 percent.

The simplest surgery can go wrong. Delivery of babies can go wrong. Anything that human beings do can go wrong.

To pass the time I do what I do best. I talk to him. I ask him questions, tell him stories. He talks about hunting in the woods, driving the big trucks, working on a hog farm in Texas, how his mama cooks venison and rabbit stew with a lot of onions and thick gravy, what it is like to work on oil rigs and what makes it dangerous work, some close calls he's had, some bad accidents he's seen.

We talk for two hours. We do not talk about death and dying. We will if the time

# An Excerpt from *Dead Man Walking*

by Sister Helen Prejean CONTINUED

comes, but for now the talking helps pass the time and maintain sanity until the time when the phone will ring and the guard will come in and say, "Sonnier, you got a stay."

Pat is hyped, at times full of bravado. "They want to see me break. Well, they'll never break me." He had talked to one of the guards about getting some barbecue corn chips and a Dr Pepper from a snack machine for me. "We'll celebrate when we get news of the stay," he told me. "Ole Maggio [the warden] thinks he's got me this time, but I'll show him. My attorney will pull off the stay at the last minute. Maybe I'll even get a good 'last' meal off of him," and he laughs. But the laugh is forced. It comes from his diaphragm. He is talking and laughing like this and I can see the terror in his eyes.

"Be a man my son." The line from Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River" wells up in my mind, the words of a priest to Sam Cardinella, who loses control of his anal sphincter muscle on the way to the gallows.

As if one can be brave by simply willing it. I wonder what kind of dignity I would muster if I were facing my executioners.

It's surreal, all of it. My mind keeps casting for something familiar to reassure myself that it is just a question of time before the stay of execution comes, that this is all a bad dream. Unreal.

At about two o'clock I go to the major's office to make the phone call.

"Sorry," Tom says, "no word yet from the court. You just have to help him wait it out."

I go back to the visiting room. He is standing up, peering eagerly through the heavy mesh screen. "No word yet," I tell him. "Would you like to pray?"

He nods his head. I don't remember the exact words of the prayer—a prayer, I'm sure, of essentials: forgiveness, courage, sustenance for the final big step if it should come.

When the prayer is over I say to him, "If you die, I want to be with you."

He says, "No. I don't want you to see it."

I say, "I can't bear the thought that you would die without seeing one loving face. I will be the face of Christ for you. Just look at me."

He says, "It's terrible to see. I don't want to put you through that. It could break you. It could scar you for life."

I know that it will terrify me. How could it not terrify me? But I feel strength and determination. I tell him it won't break me, that I have plenty of love and support in my life.

"God will give me the grace," I tell him.

He consents. He nods his head. It is decided. I will be there with him if he dies.

*Excerpt from Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States by Sister Helen Prejean, copyright © 1993 by Helen Prejean. Used by permission of Random House, an imprint and division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.*

# NEW PERSPECTIVE

The Met premiere of Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking* marks not only the start of the 2023–24 Met season but also the launch of the Neubauer Family Foundation New Works Initiative, a crucial funding effort in support of the Met's plan to bring 15 to 20 new operas to its stage over the next five seasons. It's just the latest contribution by Jeanette Lerman-Neubauer and Joseph Neubauer, who have underwritten some of the company's most consequential projects of the last 20 years, including the *Live in HD* cinema transmissions, Yannick Nézet-Séguin's musical leadership of the company, and the introduction of Sunday matinee performances.

For Jeanette Lerman-Neubauer, Opening Night of the 2021–22 season epitomized what the Met can and should be. That evening, she says, as Terence Blanchard's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* had its Met premiere, she looked around and saw the auditorium filled by an audience that looked more like New York than any she'd ever experienced: more




Jeanette Lerman-Neubauer  
and Joseph Neubauer

young people, more people of color, and many people, from all walks of life, who had never set foot in the Met before. What's more, everyone was engaged and looking to actively participate. "People had such a good time," she says, "and I saw so many spontaneous conversations erupt among strangers."

Of course, there were many ingredients to that magical occasion. "We had all come through a very hard time with the isolation of Covid, an explosion of anxiety and depression, relentless political strife—there was no comfort anywhere," Lerman-Neubauer says. "*Fire* was the first time we got back into the opera house, and it was like the epiphany at the end of a tragedy. It showed us that life was going to continue, that culture was going to continue." *Fire* also marked the first opera by a Black composer to be presented by the Met, and it told a captivating and immediately resonant modern story. Both of those facts undeniably added to the palpable impression of artistic rebirth and to the diversity of the audience. "It all created the feeling that opera could be even better than before," Lerman-Neubauer says.

When the Neubauers made their generous gift in support of the Met's efforts to nurture and present new operas, it was to ensure that there are many more nights at the Met just as inspirational, just as cathartic, and just as communal as the premiere of *Fire* was. "In opera, you squeeze into a few hours an emotional arc that is the lived experience of months if not years," Lerman-Neubauer says—an emotional journey that is shared, in real time, by the entire audience. That shared experience, she emphasizes, can be enriched by new repertoire that is free from old habits, and by new audience members who bring different perspectives with them. And the payoff of this broadening of vision is not restricted to new work; it also reveals new depth when revisiting familiar repertoire afterward. "So the message is not about how great new opera is or isn't, or how great old opera is or isn't," she says. "But these new works are an impetus to think about things in a different way, and can be the catalyst for new relationships among thinking people who are engaged with the issues of our time, issues that are being explored artistically on the Met stage."

It's that exchange of ideas and the resulting revelations that Lerman-Neubauer sees as the ultimate goal of the New Works Initiative. "The magic of the Met attracts smart and interesting people, and my greatest hope is that they will turn to someone they didn't know before the performance and talk about the things that moved them," she says. "Opera still serves to reveal the human spirit and the human psyche—under duress, when impassioned, when inspired. Telling these stories helps individuals resolve these kinds of issues in their own lives and build a healthier society." 

ALSO ON STAGE



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# NABUCCO

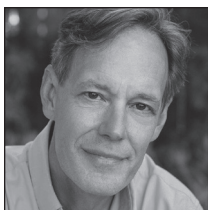
Verdi's fiery biblical drama returns in Elijah Moshinsky's epic staging, conducted by Daniele Callegari. Baritone George Gagnidze stars in the title role, alongside soprano Liudmyla Monastyrska as the bloodthirsty Abigaille and tenor SeokJong Baek and mezzo-soprano Maria Barakova as the lovers Ismaele and Fenena.

**SEP 28 OCT 1** mat, 4, 7 mat, 11, 14

Tickets from \$25 | [metopera.org](https://metopera.org)



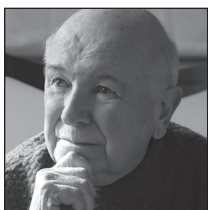
## The Cast and Creative Team



### Jake Heggie

COMPOSER (SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA)

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS** American composer Jake Heggie is best known for *Dead Man Walking*, the most widely performed new opera of the last 20 years, and his critically acclaimed operas *Moby-Dick*, *Three Decembers*, and *It's a Wonderful Life*. His opera *Intelligence* explores the true story of two women who infiltrated the Confederate White House during the Civil War. Created with Jawole Zollar and Gene Scheer, it receives its world premiere on opening night of Houston Grand Opera's season, in partnership with Urban Bush Women. Elsewhere, *Before It All Goes Dark*, a one-act opera commissioned by Music of Remembrance and based on a story originally reported by Howard Reich in the *Chicago Tribune*, will premiere in Seattle and tour to Chicago and San Francisco, while *The Elements: Fire*, a new commission for violinist Joshua Bell, premieres at Germany's Elbphilharmonie and tours to major stages in New York, Seattle, Chicago, and Hong Kong. In addition to ten full-length operas and numerous one-acts, he has composed more than 300 art songs, as well as concerti, chamber music, and choral and orchestral works. His compositions have been performed on five continents, and he regularly collaborates with the world's most beloved artists as both composer and pianist.



### Terrence McNally

LIBRETTIST (ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA)

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS** Late playwright, librettist, and LGBTQ+ trailblazer Terrence McNally was a force in the American theater for six decades and was the recipient of five Tony Awards (two for the plays *Love! Valour! Compassion!* and *Master Class*, two for the books for the musicals *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and *Ragtime*, and the 2019 Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement). He received the 2011 Dramatists Guild Lifetime Achievement Award (having served as the organization's vice president from 1981 to 2001), the 2015 Lucille Lortel Lifetime Achievement Award, a 1996 induction into the American Theater Hall of Fame, and a 2018 induction into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His other accolades include an Emmy Award, two Guggenheim Fellowships, a Rockefeller Grant, four Drama Desk Awards, two Lucille Lortel Awards, two Obie Awards, and three Hull-Warriner Awards. In 1993, he helped create the playwriting program at the Juilliard School, and his legacy lives on in his plays, musicals, and operas that continue to be performed around the world, as well as in his papers, which are kept and open to the public at the Harry Ransom Center in the University of Texas at Austin.



## The Cast and Creative Team CONTINUED



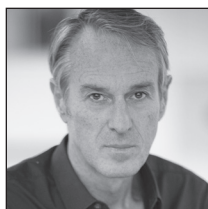
### Yannick Nézet-Séguin

CONDUCTOR (MONTREAL, CANADA)

**THIS SEASON** *Dead Man Walking*, Verdi's *Requiem*, *Florencia en el Amazonas*, *La Forza del Destino*, and *Roméo et Juliette* at the Met; *Die Walküre* in concert with the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra; and concerts with the Met Orchestra, Met Orchestra Chamber Ensemble, Orchestre Métropolitain, Philadelphia Orchestra, National Youth Orchestra of the United States of America, and Berlin Philharmonic.

**MET APPEARANCES** Since his 2009 debut leading *Carmen*, he has conducted 20 operas, including *La Bohème*, Terence Blanchard's *Champion* and *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, *Lohengrin*, Kevin Puts's *The Hours*, *Don Carlos*, and Matthew Aucoin's *Eurydice*.

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS** He is in his fifth season as the Met's Jeanette Lerman-Neubauer Music Director. He has served as music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra since 2012 and artistic director and principal conductor of the Orchestre Métropolitain since 2000. In 2018, he became honorary conductor of the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, where he was music director for ten seasons, and in 2016, he was named an honorary member of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. Between 2008 and 2014, he was principal guest conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. He has won three Grammy Awards.



### Ivo van Hove

DIRECTOR (HEIST-OP-DEN-BERG, BELGIUM)

**THIS SEASON** *Dead Man Walking* at the Met, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* at Dutch National Opera, and *Jesus Christ Superstar* on tour throughout the Netherlands.

**MET PRODUCTIONS** *Don Giovanni* (debut, 2023).

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS** He began his career as a stage director in 1981, served as general director of Internationaal Theater Amsterdam between 2001 and 2023, and becomes artistic director of Germany's Ruhrtriennale in 2024. He made his Broadway debut in 2015 with *A View from the Bridge* (winning a Tony Award for Best Direction of a Play) and returned with *The Crucible*, *Network*, and *West Side Story*. His work has appeared at the Comédie-Française, Münchner Kammerspiele, London's National Theatre, New York Theatre Workshop, Paris Opera, Polish National Opera, Komische Oper Berlin, Dutch National Opera, and Madrid's Teatro Real, among many others. He has received France's Grand Prix de la Critique, an Olivier Award, two Obie Awards, a Drama Desk Award, the Flemish Culture Prize for Overall Cultural Merit, the Netherlands' Johannes Vermeer Award, and, together with Jan Versweyveld, the Proscenium Award and the Amsterdam Award for the Arts. He is Commander in Belgium's Order of the Crown and France's Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.



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STAGE PHOTOS: MARTY SOHL / MET OPERA

## The Cast and Creative Team CONTINUED



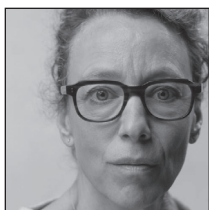
### Jan Versweyveld

SET AND LIGHTING DESIGNER (ANTWERP, BELGIUM)

**THIS SEASON** *Dead Man Walking* at the Met, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* at Dutch National Opera, and *Jesus Christ Superstar* on tour throughout the Netherlands.

**MET PRODUCTIONS** *Don Giovanni* (debut, 2023).

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS** He has worked on all of Ivo van Hove's productions in the United States and in Europe. In New York, his work has included *A View from the Bridge*, *The Crucible*, *Network*, and *West Side Story* on Broadway; Off Broadway productions of *Lazarus*, *Scenes from a Marriage*, *The Little Foxes*, *The Misanthrope*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Alice in Bed*, and *More Stately Mansions*; *A Little Life*, *Kings of War*, *Roman Tragedies*, *Angels in America*, *Opening Night*, and *Cries and Whispers* at Brooklyn Academy of Music; and *The Damned* and *The Six Brandenburg Concertos* at Park Avenue Armory. He has received numerous awards and nominations, including four Tony Award nominations.



### An D'Huys

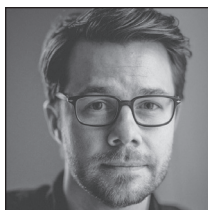
COSTUME DESIGNER (ANTWERP, BELGIUM)

**THIS SEASON** *Dead Man Walking* at the Met, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* at Dutch National Opera, *Jesus Christ Superstar* on tour throughout the Netherlands, and *Nabucco* in Seville.

**MET PRODUCTIONS** *Don Giovanni* (debut, 2023).

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS** She studied fashion at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. She was part of the design team for Ann Demeulemeester for more than a decade, and her theater credits include *A Little Life*, *All About Eve*, and *A View from the Bridge* in the West End; *A View from the Bridge*, *Network*, and *West Side Story* on Broadway; *Network* and *Hedda Gabler* at London's National Theatre; *Obsession* in London, Paris, and Luxembourg; *Lazarus* at New York Theatre Workshop; *Le Tartuffe ou l'Hypocrite* and *The Damned* at the Comédie-Française; *A Little Life*, *Husbands and Wives*, and *The Fountainhead* at Internationaal Theater Amsterdam; and *Medea* at Internationaal Theater Amsterdam and Brooklyn Academy of Music. Her designs have also appeared at the Salzburg Festival, Paris Opera, Polish National Opera, Louvre Museum, and in films including *Jaco van Dormael's Toto le Héros* and *Patrice Toye's Rosie*.

## The Cast and Creative Team CONTINUED



### Christopher Ash

PROJECTION DESIGNER (PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA)

**THIS SEASON** *Dead Man Walking* at the Met.

**MET PRODUCTIONS** *Don Giovanni* (debut, 2023).

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS** Equally at home designing projections, scenery, and lighting for theater, opera, and dance, as well as direction and cinematography for film, he has had work produced in 16 countries and recognized for 15 awards. He made his Broadway debut in 2015 as assistant scenic designer for *On the Town* and has since contributed to productions of *New York, New York*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Saint Joan*, *Prince of Broadway*, *An Act of God*, *The Crucible*, and *Network*, the last two directed by Ivo van Hove. He has created work for numerous regional American theaters, as well as for productions at the Paris Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Houston Grand Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Internationaal Theater Amsterdam, and Ballet Hispánico, among others. He is a graduate of SUNY Fredonia and the Yale School of Drama.



### Tom Gibbons

SOUND DESIGNER (LONDON, ENGLAND)

**THIS SEASON** *Dead Man Walking* for his debut at the Met and *Dear England* at London's National Theatre.

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS** He has created sound design and musical compositions for theater, film, and live installations. He made his Broadway debut in 2015 as part of the creative team for Ivo van Hove's staging of *A View from the Bridge* and has since returned with productions of *The Crucible*, *1984*, *West Side Story*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (which was prematurely closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic), and *Grey House*. He has also contributed to numerous productions at the National Theatre and in the West End, and he has received an Olivier Award and two nominations, a Tony Award nomination, and four Drama Desk Award nominations. He frequently collaborates with director Robert Icke, contributing to his productions of *The Doctor*, *Hamlet*, *Orestia*, *Judas*, *Animal Farm*, *Oedipus*, and *The Crucible*. His work has also appeared at the Young Vic, Göteborg Opera, Royal Court Theatre, Almeida Theatre, Old Vic, Theater Basel, St. Ann's Warehouse, Royal Shakespeare Company, and Donmar Warehouse, among many others.



## Joyce DiDonato

MEZZO-SOPRANO (KANSAS CITY, KANSAS)

**THIS SEASON** Sister Helen Prejean in *Dead Man Walking* and Virginia Woolf in Kevin Puts's *The Hours* at the Met; Didon in *Les Troyens* in concert with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg; Dido in *Dido and Aeneas* in concerts with Il Pomo d'Oro; and concerts in Barcelona, Vienna, at Staatsoper Berlin, and with the Kansas City Symphony.

**MET APPEARANCES** Since her 2005 debut as Cherubino in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, she has sung more than 100 performances of 14 roles, including Virginia Woolf, Sesto in *La Clemenza di Tito*, Adalgisa in *Norma*, Elena in *La Donna del Lago*, and the title roles of *Agrippina*, *Cendrillon*, *La Cenerentola*, and *Maria Stuarda*.

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS** She has previously sung Sister Helen Prejean at New York City Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and in Madrid. She has appeared with most of the world's leading opera companies, including the Vienna State Opera, Bavarian State Opera, Covent Garden, Deutsche Oper Berlin, La Scala, and Paris Opera, among many others, and has received three Grammy Awards and an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera. She was the 2007 recipient of the Met's Beverly Sills Artist Award, established by Agnes Varis and Karl Leichtman.



## Susan Graham

MEZZO-SOPRANO (ROSWELL, NEW MEXICO)

**THIS SEASON** Mrs. Patrick De Rocher in *Dead Man Walking* at the Met.

**MET APPEARANCES** Since her 1991 debut as the Second Lady in *Die Zauberflöte*, she has sung more than 200 performances of 21 roles, including Hanna Glawari in *The Merry Widow*, Prince Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus*, Countess Geschwitz in *Lulu*, Didon in *Les Troyens*, the title role of *Iphigénie en Tauride*, and Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier*. She also appeared as Jordan Baker in the world premiere of John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby* and Sondra Finchley in the world premiere of Tobias Picker's *An American Tragedy*.

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS** She has performed at all the world's leading opera houses, including the Vienna State Opera, La Scala, Covent Garden, Paris Opera, Bavarian State Opera, Salzburg Festival, Santa Fe Opera, San Francisco Opera, and Houston Grand Opera, among many others. She created the role of Sister Helen Prejean in the world premiere of *Dead Man Walking* at San Francisco Opera in 2000 and has previously appeared as Mrs. Patrick De Rocher at Lyric Opera of Chicago and Washington National Opera. Since 2017, she has served as artistic advisor to the young-artist program at LA Opera.

## The Cast and Creative Team CONTINUED



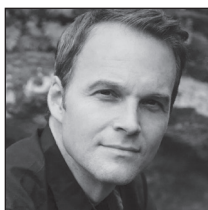
### Latonia Moore

SOPRANO (HOUSTON, TEXAS)

**THIS SEASON** Sister Rose in *Dead Man Walking* and Billie in Terence Blanchard's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* at the Met, Margherita in *Mefistofele* in Cagliari, and a recital at San Diego Opera.

**MET APPEARANCES** Musetta in *La Bohème*, Emelda Griffith in Blanchard's *Champion*, the title role of *Aida* (debut, 2012), Serena in *Porgy and Bess*, Billie, and Cio-Cio-San in *Madama Butterfly*.

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS** Recent performances include Cio-Cio-San in Bologna and at Staatsoper Berlin and the Dallas Opera, Leonora in *Il Trovatore* at Washington National Opera and the Glimmerglass Festival, Serena in concert at Lucerne Festival, *Aida* in Verona and at LA Opera, Billie at Lyric Opera of Chicago, the title role of *Tosca* at Austin Opera, and Mimi in *La Bohème* at Palm Beach Opera. She has also sung *Tosca* in Rouen and at Washington National Opera, Opera Australia, and New York City Opera; Serena at Dutch National Opera and English National Opera; *Aida* in Buenos Aires, Zurich, Bergen, and at Dubai Opera, English National Opera, and Opera Australia; Desdemona in *Otello* in Bergen; Fidelia in Puccini's *Edgar* in concert at the Klangvokal Musikfestival Dortmund; and Cio-Cio-San at San Diego Opera.



### Ryan McKinny

BASS-BARITONE (LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA)

**THIS SEASON** Joseph De Rocher in *Dead Man Walking* at the Met, Amfortas in *Parsifal* and Leporello in *Don Giovanni* at Houston Grand Opera, and Mac in the world premiere of Jake Heggie's *Before It All Goes Dark* with Music of Remembrance in Seattle, San Francisco, and Chicago.

**MET APPEARANCES** Figaro in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Biterolf in *Tannhäuser*, Kothner in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, the Speaker in *Die Zauberflöte*, Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Lt. Ratcliffe in *Billy Budd* (debut, 2012).

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS** Recent performances include Jochanaan in *Salome* at Houston Grand Opera, Bluebeard in *Bluebeard's Castle* at Boston Lyric Opera, Clarence King in John Adams's *Girls of the Golden West* in concert with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Scarpia in *Tosca* at LA Opera, and Kurwenal in *Tristan und Isolde* and Figaro at Seattle Opera. He has also sung the title role of *Don Giovanni* at Washington National Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Houston Grand Opera; Joseph De Rocher at Lyric Opera of Chicago; Amfortas at the Bayreuth Festival; and Clarence King at Dutch National Opera and in the world premiere of *Girls of the Golden West* at San Francisco Opera.