



**SAN FRANCISCO OPERA TO PRESENT WEST COAST PREMIERE OF  
*IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE* IN FALL 2018**

**NEW OPERA BY JAKE HEGGIE AND GENE SCHEER  
BASED ON THE BELOVED 1946 FRANK CAPRA FILM**

**Co-Commissioned and Co-Produced with Houston Grand Opera and  
Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music**



Jake Heggie, composer; Gene Scheer, librettist

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (November 28, 2016) — San Francisco Opera will present the West Coast premiere of *It's a Wonderful Life*, a new opera by composer **Jake Heggie** and librettist **Gene Scheer**, during the 2018–19 Season at the War Memorial Opera House. An opera in two acts, *It's a Wonderful Life* is a co-commission and co-production with Houston Grand Opera and Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music and is based on Frank Capra's beloved 1946 film *It's a Wonderful Life*<sup>™</sup>, by permission of Paramount Licensing, Inc., and "The Greatest Gift," a short story by Philip Van Doren Stern.

Today's announcement coincides with the upcoming world premiere of *It's a Wonderful Life* at Houston Grand Opera on December 2, 2016. **Patrick Summers**, Houston Grand Opera's Artistic and Music Director and a frequent Heggie collaborator, will conduct the Houston and San Francisco premieres. Casting for San Francisco Opera's production will be announced at a later date.

Along with Handel's *Messiah*, Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* and Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, the film *It's a Wonderful Life* is synonymous with the holiday season. Capra's classic of American cinema, which starred James Stewart, Donna Reed and Lionel Barrymore, tells the story of George Bailey, who, on Christmas Eve, is on the brink until the angel Clarence grants him a vision of a bleak reality in which he had never lived. Witnessing the impact of his existence on his community and loved ones, George experiences a renewed vigor for life.

Heggie and Scheer's opera departs from the film in important ways, especially through its telling of the familiar story from the perspective of the angel, re-imagined here as Clara. Heggie said: "You can't put a movie onto the opera stage. So one big challenge was to find a way to reconceive the story of *It's a Wonderful Life* as an opera. That meant lots of changes, cuts and tough choices. One of the most obvious is that Clarence, the angel of the movie, has become Clara, the angel of the opera. Vocal casting is everything in opera and this change allowed us to have a soprano voice (Clara) and a tenor voice (George Bailey) as our two leads instead of two male voices."

The composer was drawn to the subject for its characters, transformative journey, sense of wonder, magic and mystery, high stakes and the potentially dark tragedy that motivates the action. Heggie said, "The music and soundscapes attempt to capture both the otherworldly side of the story and the earthly music of each decade we explore with George: from childhood games and a high school dance, to soaring love scenes, a wedding, the despair of the crash of 1929 and World War II, the threat of a suicide and the extraordinary, transformative power of a community coming together to help."

The production for this highly-anticipated new work features director **Leonard Foglia**, set designer **Robert Brill**, costume designer **David C. Woolard**, lighting designer **Brian Nason** and projection/video designer **Elaine J. McCarthy**. The opera will again bring together Heggie and Scheer with Foglia, Brill, McCarthy and Maestro Summers, the creative team behind the internationally acclaimed world premiere production of *Moby-Dick*. The 2012 San Francisco Opera presentation of *Moby-Dick* was recorded in high-definition format video and the Company, together with EuroArts, produced DVD and Blu-ray releases of the production.

San Francisco Opera General Director **Matthew Shilvock** commented, "We look forward to reuniting with Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer on this exciting project, which will bring this iconic holiday classic to

life on the War Memorial stage in a very approachable, deeply moving new opera. This is a piece that will resonate with opera lovers and families alike: it is a universal story of hope, goodness and redemption.”

Through its many commissions and co-commissions, San Francisco Opera has emerged as a champion of modern operatic repertory and has fostered important new works by leading composers. The Company has given 19 world premieres (both main stage and for the Opera Center) and next season will present the first performances of John Adams and Peter Sellars’ new opera, *Girls of the Golden West*. Along with its record of world premieres, San Francisco Opera’s commitment to building the repertory also lies in its co-commissions of important works, including Adams and Alice Goodman’s *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991), Heggie and Scheer’s *Three Decembers* (2008) and *Moby-Dick* (2010).

The new opera will again bring together award-winning composer and San Francisco resident Heggie with San Francisco Opera, where his career as an opera composer began. Heggie’s first opera, *Dead Man Walking* with a libretto by Terrence McNally, had its world premiere at San Francisco Opera in 2000 and has since been presented around the world in over 50 productions. Praised for his more than 250 songs, as well as chamber, choral and orchestral works, Heggie has established himself as one of today’s leading opera composers. His operas also include *Great Scott* (2015), *The Radio Hour* (2014), *To Hell and Back* (2006) and *The End of the Affair* (2003; revised 2004).

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For further press information, including headshots of the creative team, visit [sfopera.com/press](http://sfopera.com/press) or contact San Francisco Opera Communications:

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