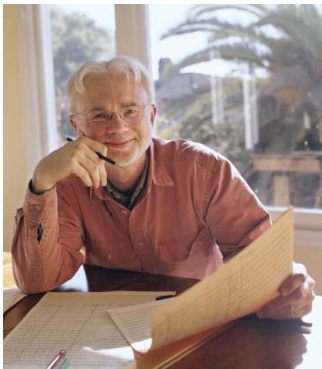




**SAN FRANCISCO OPERA TO PRESENT WORLD PREMIERE OF  
*GIRLS OF THE GOLDEN WEST*  
A NEW OPERA BY JOHN ADAMS WITH A LIBRETTO BY PETER SELLARS  
WAR MEMORIAL OPERA HOUSE, FALL 2017**

**The new work, set during the 1850s California Gold Rush, is a  
San Francisco Opera Co-Commission with  
The Dallas Opera, Dutch National Opera and Teatro La Fenice**



[John Adams ©Deborah O'Grady; John Adams and Peter Sellars ©Terrence McCarthy/San Francisco Opera; Peter Sellars]

SAN FRANCISCO (June 14, 2016) — San Francisco Opera General Director David Gockley today announced the Company will present the world premiere commission of *Girls of the Golden West*, a new opera set during the 1850s California Gold Rush, by the internationally-renowned team of composer John Adams and director/librettist Peter Sellars. Presented at the War Memorial Opera House for seven performances opening November 2017, San Francisco Opera will announce casting, conductor, design team and ticket information in January 2017 as part of the Company's 2017–18 repertory season.

Joining San Francisco Opera as co-commissioners and co-producers of this new project are The Dallas Opera, Amsterdam's Dutch National Opera (De Nationale Opera) and Teatro La Fenice, Venice. *Girls of the Golden West* is presented by arrangement with Hendon Music, Inc., a Boosey & Hawkes company, publisher and copyright owner.

Comprising two acts and sung in English, *Girls of the Golden West* is scored for eight characters, men's chorus and orchestra including musicians on guitar, accordion and piano. The libretto by Peter Sellars, who also directs the opera, is drawn from historical sources and interweaves stories of three Gold Rush women whose lives intersected in a small mining community in the Sierra Nevada mountains in 1850. The opera is based on factual events and persons that typify the mix of wildness, optimism, greed, violence, humor and racial prejudice of the era, all played out against the rugged beauty of California's mountain surroundings.

The principal narrative voice is that of Louise Amelia Knapp Smith Clappe, a doctor's wife, whose letters written under the pen-name "Dame Shirley" during her 18-month sojourn in the rough-and-ready mining camp of Rich Bar, are among the most vivid and evocative literary sources of the Gold Rush period. In the course of her time there, she witnessed frantic and often chaotic gold mining, claim disputes, the destruction of natural surroundings, whippings, murders, lynching's, encounters with the local Native Americans and a striking array of diverse nationalities all thrown together in the shared desire for quick wealth.

In addition to the "Dame Shirley Letters," the opera libretto sources include the lyrics of original Gold Rush songs, passages from Mark Twain, newspaper accounts, political slogans, Chinese poetry from the era and memoirs by Mexicans who worked the mines.

Composer **John Adams**, who has lived in California for 45 years said: "The Gold Rush was California's first 'bubble.' Those who came here were willing to give up everything and endure the worst in hopes of a quick fortune. A drama played out against the backdrop of California's natural beauty, the Gold Rush brought out the very best and the very worst of human traits, from scenes of ugly nativist racism and casual violence to examples of nobility, generosity and ingenuity—and of course there was always that great humor, gritty and self-deprecating. To be able to set to music the authentic voices of these people, whether from their letters or their songs or from newspaper accounts from their time, is a great privilege for me. These events took place literally in my own backyard. Not many composers can hope to be as lucky as I to have this connection to the historical reality."

Director and librettist **Peter Sellars** commented: "While I was doing research to create a new production of Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West* for a European company, I uncovered a treasure trove of fascinating historical and literary descriptions of accounts from the California Gold Rush, unveiling vivid and fascinating personalities, events and situations. These true stories of

the Forty-Niners are overwhelming in their heroism, passion and cruelty, telling tales of racial conflicts, colorful and humorous exploits, political strife and struggles to build anew a life and to decide what it would mean to be American. I'm hugely stimulated by the dynamic, high-spirited and deeply moving music that John is creating, and I am in high anticipation in my eagerness to bring this new work to life, first in San Francisco, and later around the world."

San Francisco Opera General Director **David Gockley** said, "When longtime colleagues John Adams and Peter Sellars approached me with their idea of a new opera set in the period of the California Gold Rush, I was very delighted with the opportunity to present the world premiere here in the city created in large part by the 1849 Gold Rush. The subject of *Girls of the Golden West*, with its colorful stories dramatizing the free-for-all spirit of this pivotal time in California history, is perfectly suited to John and his home base here in California. However the story also has universal appeal with its bold, unconventional and wildly diverse characters who typify the adventurousness of the American spirit. The invigorating originality of John's music paired with the inventiveness of Peter's staging and libretto promise to make this opera an exhilarating new addition to the repertoire."

**Gockley** continued: "In its recent history San Francisco Opera has proudly presented John's major operas, beginning with our co-commission and West Coast premiere of *The Death of Klinghoffer* in 1992, followed by our commission and world premiere of *Doctor Atomic* in 2005, and most recently in 2012 with *Nixon in China*, an opera whose commission and world premiere under my leadership at Houston Grand Opera in 1987 I consider to be one of my personal career highlights."

*Girls of the Golden West*, together with the forthcoming co-commission from composer Jake Heggie now scheduled for the 2018–19 Season, mark David Gockley's 10th commission for San Francisco Opera in addition to his 35 new works for Houston Grand Opera for a total of 45 career commissions.

**Keith Cerny**, General Director and CEO of The Dallas Opera said, "I've been an admirer of the work of John Adams and Peter Sellars for many years, and had the privilege of working for the San Francisco Opera during the premiere of their extraordinary *Doctor Atomic*, one of the most important operas of the last 25 years. On behalf of The Dallas Opera, Music Director Emmanuel Villaume and I are delighted to be a part of this major commission, our fifth since 2010, and we look forward to presenting Adams' new opera during the Texas Company's 2020–2021 season."

"Teatro La Fenice is proud to partner with San Francisco Opera, The Dallas Opera and Dutch National Opera on this exciting new commission from John Adams and Peter Sellars, two of the leading artists of our time," said General Manager **Cristiano Chiarot**. "*Girls of the Golden West*

is a quintessentially American story with universal themes that will resonate with audiences in Italy and around the world, and it continues La Fenice’s commitment to presenting new works.”

“The opera community of The Netherlands has long enjoyed the adventurous and imaginative works of John Adams and Peter Sellars, especially our past presentations of *Nixon in China* and *Doctor Atomic*,” said Dutch National Opera’s Head of Artistic Affairs **Jesús Iglesias Noriega**.

“We’re very honored to participate in this important commissioning project with our international colleagues, and look forward to the premiere of what will surely be a bold and exciting new addition to the opera repertoire.”

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For further press information, visit [sfopera.com/press](http://sfopera.com/press) or contact –  
San Francisco Opera Communications:

Jon Finck (415) 565-6472 / [jfinck@sfopera.com](mailto:jfinck@sfopera.com)

Julia Inouye (415) 565-6430 / [jinouye@sfopera.com](mailto:jinouye@sfopera.com)

National Press Representation:

Shuman Associates (212) 315-1300 / [shumanpr@shumanassociates.net](mailto:shumanpr@shumanassociates.net)