



SAN FRANCISCO OPERA AWARDS OPERA MEDAL TO HEAD OF PROPERTIES LORI HARRISON



Lori Harrison was awarded the San Francisco Opera Medal. Photo: Kristen Loken/San Francisco Opera

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (December 2, 2024) — At the conclusion of the Friday, November 29 performance of Bizet's *Carmen*, San Francisco Opera Dianne and Tad Taube General Director Matthew Shilvock presented the Company's longtime Head of Properties, Lori Harrison, with the San Francisco Opera Medal, the Company's highest honor. Harrison, who will retire from the Company this month, led a distinguished 32-year tenure with San Francisco Opera, joining in 1985 as a production assistant and member of the stage crew and, after a brief hiatus working in television and film, returned as Head of Properties in 1998.

Properties (or props for short) are the objects on stage that artists interact with during a performance, including the furniture they sit on, weapons brandished in battles, animals (including Drogen, the horse that appeared in the production of *Carmen*), falling snow, chandeliers, letters of assignation, stage blood, and fake and edible food.

Shilvock said: "For the last 26 years, Lori Harrison has led our props department with a passionate creativity that connects the stage traditions of the past with new technologies of the future, guiding and shaping the artistic integrity of our physical productions with an eye to detail. But Lori's relationship with the Company goes back much further. It was in 1985 that she began at San Francisco Opera, and she has forged an extraordinary institutional memory that connects us in the here and now to the generations who shaped the San Francisco Opera stage.

"Not only does Lori possess skills that can at times make her seem like a conjurer—you only need to think of something, and you turn around and her team has already made it—but Lori is also

passionate about sharing those skills. Whether training new generations of props artists or going into schools and inspiring students, she makes the theater a welcoming place full of curiosity and magic to be discovered. She is an incredible ambassador for the art form."

Harrison has brought curiosity, skill, collaborative spirit and an immense wealth of knowledge and experience to the art of designing, building and sourcing props at San Francisco Opera. Under her leadership, the work of the properties department has earned a stellar reputation among creative teams who know their artistic visions will come to life onstage with objects that are meticulously researched for authenticity and safety of use.

After her early work in the theater at the University of Pennsylvania and positions with Santa Fe Opera and Miami Opera, Harrison joined San Francisco Opera in 1985 as second production assistant for Puccini's *Tosca* and first production assistant on Britten's *Billy Budd*. Harrison recalled, "*Billy Budd* is actually a pretty difficult score, so on the bus to and from my scene-shop job, I had my headphones on, a little cassette player and the score. I sat there counting and, towards the end of the opera, realized that they were going to hang *Billy Budd* and I began crying. People were looking at me concerned but I was like, 'they're going to hang *Billy Budd*!' Opera does that to you."

Harrison stayed on with the Company as a member of the stage crew for six years. She shared, "One production that stands out from that time was *War and Peace* [by Sergei Prokofiev, Company premiere September 1991]. It was a *massive* show! There was a point at which I finally counted all the props, and the list was 3,000 items. That was extraordinary, and I really loved that. That's when I realized where I wanted to be, in props."

Following a brief hiatus to work in props for television and movie sets, such as the hit slasher film *Scream* and the series *Nash Bridges*, Harrison returned to the Company as Head of Properties in 1998. Under her leadership, the properties department has created and sourced props for hundreds of productions, including 21 commissioned and co-commissioned new operas, including Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally's *Dead Man Walking* (2000), Bright Sheng and David Henry Hwang's *Dream of the Red Chamber* (2016), Mason Bates and Mark Campbell's *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs* (2023) and Kaija Saariaho, Sofi Oksanen and Aleksis Barrière's *Innocence* (2024).

In accepting the award, Harrison first directed her attention to the members of the properties department who joined her onstage for the presentation. "We have a reputation in this house that we can do anything and that's because *you* can do anything. Thank you." She then addressed the audience: "It's an honor and a privilege to be with this Company over all these years and to be a part of the opera community and that includes all of you."

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, Nina Stemme, Simon Estes, Regine Créspin and Jess Thomas; former music directors Donald Runnicles and Nicola Luisotti; orchestra musicians Zaven Melikian and David Kadarrauch; and crew members like head carpenter Michael Kane, scenic artist Jay Kotcher and head of hair and make-up Gerd Mairandres.

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PRESS PHOTOS: Artist headshots and production images for Lori Harrison receiving the Opera Medal are available at sfopera.com/press.

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