

**OPERA SAN JOSÉ ANNOUNCES VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE OF
Jake Heggie’s “Three Decembers”
STARRING WORLD-RENOWNED MEZZO SOPRANO
SUSAN GRAHAM
AND CELEBRATED OPERA SAN JOSÉ RESIDENT ARTISTS
MAYA KHERANI AND EFRAÍN SOLÍS
Launches December 3, 2020**

SAN JOSE, CA (20 October 2020) – **Opera San José** has announced it will present a new fully staged production of Jake Heggie’s chamber opera, *Three Decembers*, featuring world-renowned mezzo-soprano **Susan Graham** in the central role, alongside celebrated Opera San José Resident Artists soprano **Maya Kherani** and baritone **Efraín Solís**, in a world-class digital production offered via on-demand streaming beginning December 3, 2020. Based on the unpublished play *Some Christmas Letters* by Tony Award winning playwright Terrance McNally, *Three Decembers* follows the captivating story of a famous actress, Madeline Mitchell, and her two adult children, Beatrice and Charlie over three decades (1986, 1996, and 2006), bringing to mesmerizing life a family struggling to connect, as long-held secrets come to light. With a brilliant, witty libretto by Gene Scheer and a soaring musical score by Jake Heggie, *Three Decembers* is a 90-minute fullhearted American opera about family – the ones we are born into and those we create. Pianist/Head of Music Staff **Veronika Agranov-Dafoe** and pianist **Sunny Yoon** join the celebrated cast in an intimate, dual-piano arrangement created and conducted by Opera San José Resident Artist conductor **Christopher James Ray** specifically for this vibrant production. Captured in Opera San José’s new Fred Heiman Digital Media Studio and directed by **Tara Branham**, *Three Decembers* will launch its digital performances with a celebratory gala featuring a post-show conversation with Susan Graham, Jake Heggie, and the full artistic team on **December 3, 2020**, and then will be available to stream on demand for a limited time. Tickets are \$40 per household (includes on-demand streaming access only) or \$50 per household (includes on-demand streaming access plus admission to the post-show

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gala Dec. 3). For more information or to purchase tickets, the public can visit operasj.org or call **(408) 437-4450** (open Monday through Friday, 9:00am–5:00pm).

Met with critical acclaim, *Three Decembers* has been hailed by *Opera Today* as “a modern masterpiece” with “a score filled with pleasures” that “provokes feeling and demands emotional reaction.” Declared “an engaging crowd pleaser” by the *Chicago Tribune*, this lustrous one act, 90-minute foray into one riveting family is composed for three singers (soprano, mezzo-soprano, and baritone), is sung in English, and offers a thrilling experience for theatergoers and opera lovers alike. Jake Heggie returns to Opera San José, where his *Moby Dick* captured critical and popular acclaim in the company’s 2019-20 season.

Determined to support artists and continue presenting art during this pandemic, Opera San José General Director **Khori Dastoor** envisioned this pioneering production as an opportunity to utilize the know-how of the company’s Silicon Valley environs to make music performances available during this crisis. The company assembled an outstanding team to create a safe performance space, operated under the strictest safety protocols, to achieve a world-class digital capture. The participating artists quarantined and created a social pod, allowing them to safely interact during the process. All cast and crew underwent frequent COVID testing and temperature checks and adhered to strict masking and social distancing protocols. The filming space was cleaned/disinfected continually and divided by clear plexiglass barriers, isolating musicians/conductors from singers, and all crew wore personal protective equipment (PPE). A dedicated COVID-19 safety officer remained on-site throughout the entire process to ensure that all safety measures were strictly observed, enabling the company to proceed with the creation of this extraordinary production. Members of the creative team included **Christopher James Ray** (Conductor), **Tara Branham** (Stage Director), **Steven C. Kemp** (Set Designer), **Alyssa Oania** (Costume Coordinator), **David Lee Cuthbert** (Lighting Designer) **Christina Martin** (Hair and Makeup Designer), **Flying Moose Pictures** (Video Production), and **Jake Heggie** (Artistic Advisor).

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American mezzo-soprano **Susan Graham** makes her company debut at Opera San José as Madeline Mitchell, reuniting with composer Jake Heggie, who created the role of Sister Helen in *Dead Man Walking* especially for her. Hailed as “an artist to treasure” by *The New York Times*, Graham rose to the highest echelon of international performers within just a few years of her professional debut, appearing in the great opera houses of the world – from Milan’s La Scala to the Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Vienna State Opera, Opéra National de Paris, Dresden’s Semperoper, and the Salzburg Festival Graham. Graham launched onto the national scene as a winner in the Metropolitan Opera’s National Council Auditions, and her Bay Area connections include her tenure in San Francisco’s Merola Opera Program, where she was awarded the Schwabacher Award. She went on to make her international debut at Covent Garden in 1994, playing Massinet’s *Chérubin*. Graham’s earliest operatic successes were in such trouser roles as Cherubino in Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro*. Her technical expertise soon brought mastery of more virtuosic parts, and she went on to triumph as Octavian in Richard Strauss’s *Der Rosenkavalier* and the Composer in his *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Graham sang the leading ladies in the Metropolitan Opera’s world premieres of John Harbison’s *The Great Gatsby* and Tobias Picker’s *An American Tragedy*, and made her musical theater debut in Rodgers & Hammerstein’s *The King and I* at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. In concert, she makes regular appearances with the world’s foremost orchestras, often in French repertoire, while her distinguished discography comprises a wealth of opera, orchestral, and solo recordings. Among her numerous honors are a Grammy Award, an Opera News Award, and *Musical America’s* Vocalist of the Year. As one of the foremost exponents of French vocal music, Graham has also been recognized with the French government’s “Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur.”

Lauded for her vibrant voice and exciting characterizations from the Baroque to the modern, soprano **Maya Kherani** returns to Opera San José as a 2020/21 Resident Artist, and portrays Beatrice in this production. Kherani made her company debut as a guest artist during the 2017-18 season, appearing as Despina in Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, Yvette (Lisette cover) in Puccini’s *La Rondine*, and in 2018 as Blonde (cover) in Mozart’s *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. Additional

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career highlights include starring in the title role of Handel's *Partenope* with Opera NEO; Meera in the premiere of Jack Perla's *The River of Light*, commissioned by the Houston Grand Opera; and Altisidore in Boismortier's *Don Quichote chez la Duchesse* with Central City Opera. Upcoming debuts include engagements with the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Vancouver Symphony, and Boston Baroque. She received First Place and Audience Favorite at the James Toland Vocal Competition, two Encouragement Awards from the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and this year, was the only American soprano to compete as a Semifinalist in the international Glyndebourne Opera Cup.

Applauded by the *San Francisco Chronicle* for his "theatrical charisma and musical bravado," Opera San José 2020-21 Resident Artist baritone **Efraín Solís** makes his debut with the company as Charlie in this production. Solís is a recent graduate of the San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship and while with the company sang his first performances of Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte*, Dandini in *La cenerentola*, Schaunard in *La bohème*, Silvano in *Un ballo in maschera*, Sciarrone in *Tosca*, and Prince Yamadori in *Madama Butterfly*. Recent performances include Lieutenant Audeberet in Puts's *Silent Night* (Utah Opera), Mark in Martinez's *Cruzar la cara de la luna* (Houston Grand Opera, New York City Opera, El Paso Opera), Mercutio in Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* (Utah Opera, Virginia Opera, Opera Carolina, Toledo Opera), Figaro in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* (Opera Memphis, Livermore Valley Opera), and El Payador in Piazzolla's *Maria de Buenos Aires* (Opera Southwest). His debuts scheduled for last season with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Fort Worth Opera were cancelled by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stage Director **Tara Branham** returns to Opera San José as Resident Director for its 2020-21 season. Her work was seen in the past two seasons at the helm of OSJ's productions of *Madama Butterfly*, *Die Fledermaus*, and *Hansel and Gretel*. Branham has built a robust directing portfolio both in opera and theatre across the country, with companies including Opera Theatre St. Louis, Chicago Opera Theatre, Long Beach Opera Theater, as well as Actors Theatre of Louisville, and Chicago's famed Steppenwolf Theatre Company. She is the recipient of the National New Play Network Producer-in-

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Residence Fellowship with Prop Thtr, where she founded the Chicago Directors Workshop committed to the development of directors.

Conductor **Christopher James Ray** returns to Opera San José for a second consecutive year in the company's resident ensemble. In 2017 he joined the music staff of the renowned Bayreuth Festival, where he worked on productions of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, *Lohengrin*, *Götterdämmerung*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and *Parsifal*. Ray made his professional debut leading a double bill of *Gianni Schicchi* and *Pagliacci* with Mississippi Opera in 2014. Past conducting credits with Opera San José include *Il trovatore*, *Hansel & Gretel*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Moby Dick*, and *Pagliacci*. As assistant conductor, Ray has worked with the San Francisco Symphony, Memphis Symphony, Salzburg State Theater, North Carolina Opera, and Sarasota Opera. A protege of American composer Carlisle Floyd, Ray is a sought-after interpreter of Floyd's works. In addition to serving as the assistant to the composer, he recorded an album of Floyd's songs with celebrated mezzo-soprano Susanne Mentzer.

The **Fred Heiman Digital Media Studio** was made possible by a generous lead donation from Opera San José trustee Peggy Heiman in honor of her late husband, devoted Opera San José supporter Fred Heiman.

This production of *Three Decembers* was made possible by the Carol Franc Buck Foundation and the Ann and Gordan Getty Foundation. Opera San José is supported, in part, by a Cultural Affairs grant from the City of San Jose, and Applied Materials Foundation.

Opera San José is a professional, regional opera company that is unique in the United States. Maintaining a resident company of artists and supporting emerging talent in role debuts, Opera San José specializes in showcasing the finest young professional singers in the nation. In addition to mainstage performances, Opera San José maintains extensive educational programs in schools and

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in the community at large and offers preview lectures and Introduction to Opera talks for all mainstage productions.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: **Opera San José** has announced it will present a new fully staged production of Jake Heggie’s chamber opera, ***Three Decembers***, featuring world-renowned mezzo-soprano **Susan Graham** in the central role, alongside celebrated Opera San José Resident Artists soprano **Maya Kherani** and baritone **Efraín Solís**, in a world-class digital production offered via on-demand streaming beginning December 3, 2020. Based on the unpublished play *Some Christmas Letters* by Tony Award winning playwright Terrance McNally, *Three Decembers* follows the captivating story of a famous actress, Madeline Mitchell, and her two adult children, Beatrice and Charlie over three decades (1986, 1996, and 2006), bringing to mesmerizing life a family struggling to connect, as long-held secrets come to light. With a brilliant, witty libretto by Gene Scheer and a soaring musical score by Jake Heggie, *Three Decembers* is a 90-minute fullhearted American opera about family – the ones we are born into and those we create. Pianist/Head of Music Staff **Veronika Agranov-Dafoe** and pianist **Sunny Yoon** join the celebrated cast in an intimate, dual-piano arrangement created and conducted by Opera San José Resident Artist conductor **Christopher James Ray** specifically for this vibrant production. Captured in Opera San José’s new Fred Heiman Digital Media Studio and directed by **Tara Branham**, *Three Decembers* will launch its digital performances with a celebratory gala featuring a post-show conversation with Susan Graham, Jake Heggie, and the full artistic team on **December 3, 2020**, and then will be available to stream on demand for a limited time.

WHEN: **December 3, 2020** - Gala opening with post-show conversation
Available for streaming on demand for a limited time.

TICKETS: \$50 per household (includes on-demand streaming access with an invite to the post-show gala on December 3, 2020) or \$40 per household (on-demand streaming access only). Opera San José subscribers will receive special post-show gala access at a discounted rate.

INFO: For more information, the public can visit operasj.org or call **(408) 437-4450** (open Monday through Friday, 9:00am–5:00pm).

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PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available here:
<http://www.cbpr.co/press/threedecembers>