

## **And Then One Night... The Making of DEAD MAN WALKING**

### *Complete program transcript*

Prologue:

*Sister Helen and Joe Confession scene.*

### **SISTER HELEN**

I got an invitation to write to somebody on death row and then I walked with him to the electric chair on the night of April the fifth, 1984. And once your boat gets in those waters, then I became a witness.

*Louisiana TV footage of Sister Helen at Hope House*

**NARRATION:** “Dead Man Walking” follows the journey of a Louisiana nun, Sister Helen Prejean, to the heart of the death penalty controversy.

*We see **Sister Helen** visiting with prisoners at Angola.*

**NARRATION:** Her groundbreaking work with death row inmates inspired her to write a book she called “Dead Man Walking.” Her story inspired a powerful feature film...

*Clip of the film: Dead Man Walking*

**NARRATION:** ...and now, an opera....

*Clip from the opera “Dead Man Walking”*

### **SISTER HELEN**

I never dreamed I was going to get with death row inmates. I got involved with poor people and then learned there was a direct track from being poor in this country and going to prison and going to death row.

**NARRATION:** As the opera began to take shape, the death penalty debate claimed center stage in the news.

Gov. George Ryan, IL: I now favor a moratorium because I have grave concerns about our state’s shameful record of convicting innocent people and putting them on death row.

Gov. George W. Bush, TX: I’ve been asked this question a lot ever since Governor Ryan declared a moratorium in Illinois. And I don’t believe we need one in Texas. And the reason why is, I’m confident that every person that has been put to death under our state has been guilty of the crime charged.

### **SISTER HELEN – *protester footage***

The deepest moral question about the death penalty is not what to do about innocent people. We know we shouldn’t be executing the innocent. What about somebody we know is really guilty? Can we execute them?

*Performance clip of angry convict doing push-ups in cell – dramatic music*

**LOTFI MANSOURI** - General Director, San Francisco Opera

I've always wanted to prove to everybody that opera is an art form that can deal with any topic. // And so I felt that it would be wonderful to approach the subject of capital punishment.

*Headlines, flashing police lights*

**NARRATION:** “Dead Man Walking” would seek to reflect the grief and sense of loss so often captured in the headlines. As we followed the making of the opera, three of these individuals told us their stories.

**BETTY CARLSON** – mother of victim

Our kids were the most non-violent people I've ever known in my life, had this dreadful violence heaped upon them.

**WILLIAM AUGUST** – father of victim

The next car was my son and he just drove on the right side of him and shot him.

**BILL BABBITT:** - brother of death row inmate

In my brother's last days, he wasn't even permitted to hug his mother in his last days without shackles.

**SISTER HELEN**

So to see an opera being done which is going to help people reflect on this, you know, is something that is deeply satisfying for me. So glad that this story can be told.

*Susan Graham as Sister Helen solo about being the face of love*

**Opening Titles: AND THEN ONE NIGHT...**

**Underwriting Credits**

**ACT ONE – PRESENT AT THE CREATION**

*Opening Night pre-performance excitement. Exteriors of the Opera House, women in gowns and men in tuxes entering, palpable excitement. Audience members give their views on the death penalty and speculate on how the opera will treat it.*

**NARRATION:** October 7, 2000 was the culmination of an ambitious, creative journey that spanned three years. “Dead Man Walking” promised to be a potent combination of art and controversy.

**Audience members**

**(Blonde woman)**

This Opera is dealing with a theme that has such national resonance right now.

**(Two women)**

It was the subject matter that got us here.

**(Couple-man/woman)**

Well, I'm for capital punishment and he's against it, so we're kind of arguing that.

**(Man with glasses)**

Unfortunately, I'm on the fence.

**(2<sup>nd</sup> Blonde Woman)**

I'm not totally opposed to the death penalty, either.

**(Asian Woman)**

It'll be interesting to see how the music world deals with that topic and what kind of, you know, discussion they give it musically.

## **SISTER HELEN**

When I heard that they were going to do an opera, I thought music can take us into places of our hearts we don't even know we have. And so what better way than through music for this story?

*Susan Graham sings "Take my hand"*

**NARRATION:** Commissioning any new opera is a daunting task, but with "Dead Man Walking," Lotfi Mansouri took an even greater risk. He selected a writer, a director, and a composer who'd never created an opera before.

*We see JAKE HEGGIE at the piano in his home, etc. as we hear...*

## **LOTFI MANSOURI**

Jake Heggie was in our publicity department, and he started doing some songs and song cycles for people like Frederica Von Stade, // and I felt that I wanted to take a chance with him.

**JAKE HEGGIE,** Composer

I'm unproven as an opera composer and I know that. // Lotfi Mansouri // said to me, well, 'You're writing all these songs that are being performed all over the world. Have you ever thought about writing an opera?' // I want to send you to New York to meet with Terrence McNally and let's talk about which subject you're gonna choose for your opera for this commission...

*Shots of playbills of McNally plays -- 'Corpus Christi,' 'Ragtime', 'Love, Valor, Compassion', 'The Master Class.'*

## **LOTFI MANSOURI**

I had been interested in Terrence McNally for many years. Because Terrence, number one, is a wonderful playwright. Very theatrical. Also he loves opera.

*Cover of 'Les Belles de Nuit'*

**JAKE HEGGIE**

And at that point Lotfi had asked me to write a comedy, an adaptation of this French film called Les Belles De Nuit. Well, Terrence could not have been less interested in this project.

**TERRENCE McNALLY,** Librettist

It was almost a year before I one day, just walking down the street, the notion of "Dead Man Walking" struck me.

**LOTFI MANSOURI**

And I said, that sounds wonderful, uh, let's look into that. That's how it started.

*Dead Man poster in lobby and photo of Lotfi Mansouri with Phyllis Wattis*

**NARRATION:** Funding for the new opera was the first obstacle to overcome. Lotfi Mansouri's enthusiasm brought San Francisco art patron Phyllis Wattis on board.

**PHYLLIS WATTIS, Patron**

It's a controversial subject and I accepted it with great reluctance.

**JAKE HEGGIE**

Think of Phyllis Wattis coming up with two million dollars to support a project by a composer she's never heard of and a subject she's not so sure about, but because Lotfi's behind it and because the San Francisco Opera's behind it, she's going to trust.

**PHYLLIS WATTIS**

Even the tried and true operas take a lot of money to produce, so it might just as well produce one that's new at the same time. // People look forward to it, and like many things they hate it or they love it.

*WORKSHOP SCENES from 1999*

**NARRATION:** It was Summer, 1999. The libretto was complete and the score only missing the finale. A workshop was held to perform the opera for the first time, over a year before the actual premiere. Resident San Francisco Opera singers filled in for those members of the final cast who could not attend.

**TERRENCE McNALLY**

I write // contemporary vernacular American English. And I said to Jake, this is how I write. Is that all right with you? // I don't think people talk poetically in the situation these people find themselves in. It's the music that's going to add the dimension of the poetry.

**JAKE HEGGIE:** (in rehearsal) Could you stop for a second? "Do you honestly feel that this..." He's angry.

**JAKE HEGGIE**

My responsibility as the composer is to find the music that that person would sing. // Now someone like Joe de Rocher, our, our, our inmate, death row inmate in 'Dead Man Walking,' um, it wasn't that easy to find.

*Performance clip of Packard on stage in cell*

**PACKARD:** "21, 22, 23 24..."

**LOTFI MANSOURI:**

In casting, uh, for the title role, I was in New York auditioning 35, 36 baritones.

*Packard sings: Everybody hear that?...*

**LOTFI MANSOURI:**

And then when this young man John Packard came onstage and started singing, I said that's him.

*Von Stade and Graham in duet: "My boy is not a bad boy...."*

**LOTFI MANSOURI**

...and of course to have Frederica Von Stade to play the mother...that's such a wonderful luxury...

*Von Stade and Graham duet continues*

**FREDERICA VON STADE VO & OC**

Here's a woman who has really no control over what's happened to her children, // and that's something that effects every parent in, at some point, and it was something that I just wanted to explore.

*Von Stade & Susan Graham duet continues*

**LOTFI MANSOURI:**

Then of course, I had to go through all sorts of song and dance to free Susan Graham from a commitment at the Paris Opera.

**Susan Graham** in rehearsal: "Come on clap! Alright!"

**SUSAN GRAHAM**

It's always tricky when you're portraying a living person. // Sister Helen's got a great sense of spirit and spunkiness and, and sense of humor and sarcasm and wit. Her personality is bigger than the whole outdoors.

*Performance scene of "Elvis song" over end of Graham*

*Transition back WORKSHOP SCENE featuring JOHN PACKARD - Elvis scene in workshop:*

**Jake Heggie:**

And I think you guys should just hold it.

**Kristin Clayton:**

A rock and roll nun...I love that.

**Terrence McNally:**

They had asked me if she went to Vegas? I said I don't know, I made it all up... She should have..."My Helen Goes to Las Vegas"...This is not a documentary...it's a new Opera!

## **JOHN PACKARD**

This is my big break...the music fits me. It even fits me better now that we're here in this workshop / and we are working through the music with Jake and Patrick Summers and all of us contributing our ideas. // And this doesn't happen very often. The fact that San Francisco is taking the time to really make sure that this is a collaboration and a very strong work.

*Patrick Summers conducting in rehearsal*

## **PATRICK SUMMERS, Conductor**

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the public was interested in new works. The public wasn't particularly interested in the music of the past. // Living in the moment. That's the greatest thing music has taught me. // So what better way than to have compositions that are right out of our own time, and even in this country, right out of the American vernacular?

*Cop and Helen performance – getting a ticket driving to Angola*

## **Jake Heggie**– sound up in workshop

“Da, dat. Answer the question. Ba Dump. Christ said. Don't give me Christ, Ba Dump. Give me Helen Prejean. Ba Dump, Ba Bump.”

**Patrick Summers:** “I think we need to do that again.”

## **PATRICK SUMMERS**

The conductor is the representative of the composer in that moment. So it is, it is a much more collaborative and interesting process when the composer is there next to you.

*Workshop clips – Jake at the piano, hears singers: “What time is it? Nearly seven”*

## **PATRICK SUMMERS**

Jake cannot write other than as himself. It's direct and honest, makes an incredible emotional impact on first hearing. It is tuneful. It's intellectual. It's, it's the coming together of a lot of elements in modern music...

*WORKSHOP version of “You Don't Know” starts and stops. In between we hear and see JAKE HEGGIE*

## **JAKE HEGGIE**

In the first act of the opera, that scene where the parents express their grief and their loss, that big ensemble, // that is the whole point of the story, which is this man has taken away these children from these parents and it's a loss that will never, ever, it's a hole that will never, ever be filled --ever.

*We hear a segment of “You don't Know what it's like,” enough to understand the meaning of the song, then participants stop singing to discuss possible changes, and we hear...*

## **FREDERICA VON STADE** plays role of convict's mother

Opera is so much about the past // and here we're in something that is blatantly current. I mean, it's a political issue. It's, it's a daily issue. It's part of our lives.

*Police siren*

*On-camera interviews below are interspersed with news coverage of the events described and photos of their murdered or executed relatives.*

**BETTY CARLSON**

On April 19th, 1974 a man broke into our son's house. Took our daughter-in-law downstairs at knife-point. Had her tie our son to a chair where he was beaten to death with a bread board and a claw hammer. Annette was taken upstairs and was violated sexually and physically for six hours. He did unspeakable things to, to her, and when he left he set both of them and the house on fire. And that's what happened to Annette and Frank.

*Footage and headlines of Carlson case*

**NARRATION:** Betty Carlson's daughter-in-law Annette miraculously survived, and identified the killer. He was sentenced to death, but in 1976, California briefly banned the death penalty. At that time, a life sentence without parole was not possible. To date, Betty Carlson has testified at nine parole hearings of her son's killer, pleading that he remain in prison.

*Archival footage of Betty Carlson at pardon board hearing*

**Man's voice**

He beat Frank Carlson's brains out of his head.

**BETTY CARLSON**

The fact that this lives with me for days and weeks following the parole hearing, // I think is unconscionable, and we should not...none of the victims should have to experience this again.

*"You Don't Know" mother duet workshop clip*

**William August from news story:** "I'm still waiting for him to walk in that door."

**NARRATION:** William August's son was murdered in 1989.

*Nighttime freeway footage*

**WILLIAM AUGUST**

My son was returning home one night. There was a guy on the freeway that was attempting to shoot other people.

**NARRATION:** Raymond August was one of several victims shot and killed at random that night.

**WILLIAM AUGUST**

And my wife come in and asked me well, what had happened because she know I left but I didn't come home to tell her. I didn't even know how to tell her that. And then I just finally say it, that we lost our son. And that was just so...and we just sit right there in the dark.

*You Don't Know continues*

*News footage of the killer in court*

**WILLIAM AUGUST**

Well, there was a trial and he was convicted and sentenced the death penalty. I would doubt that I see him executed. // He's number three hundred and something on death row. // I just want to see him punished for his crime, but I would give him up if I could get my son back.

*Silent performance shot of parents at pardon board, another phase of "You Don't Know"*

**TERRENCE McNALLY**

I tried to write this from the point of view of Sister Helen and of the parents and of the prisoner. // I think the place that Sister Helen has ended up is a very difficult one for most of us to reach.

**JAMES ANDERSON**, Alameda County, Assistant District Attorney

I believe the death penalty is the appropriate punishment for certain types of crimes. Ah, you know, they're just so horrible that you just can't imagine what it does to, you know, the family of, the surviving family members and the, and the community as a whole.

**MIKE FARRELL**, President, Death Penalty Focus

The death penalty is not a socially acceptable answer. It's not even a personally acceptable answer. Killing in order to prove that killing is wrong is inherently contradictory.

**TERRENCE McNALLY**

I think it's so easy to talk about capital punishment in an abstract way: I'm against it...I'm for it. I think it's very difficult to know how you really feel about it when it's more personal.

*CUT back to the WORKSHOP Performance 1999*

**ROBERT ORTH** (plays role of parent)

I've always been, as far as I can remember, opposed to the death penalty, so it's been very funny for me to be one of the characters that the audience, um, sort of identifies with as a spokesman if not for the death penalty, certainly for victims' rights.

**CATHERINE COOK** (plays role of parent)

When Jake was first, when we were first talking about this project, I said, 'Oh, I can't imagine if that was my son,' and he said, 'Well, yeah, but what if it was your son that killed the kids? Would you want him to die?'

*Scene of Bill Babbitt holding a newspaper story about his brother, "Manny Babbitt, on death row".*

**BILL BABBITT**

I suspected my brother of doing this crime, and I knew that I had to take action. I had to get him off the street.

*KRON TV news report shows the victim's covered body being wheeled out of her house. We see photos of Manny Babbitt in Vietnam in the '60s and in San Quentin now.*

**NARRATION:** When an elderly woman died after a robbery and beating, Bill Babbitt turned in his brother Manny, a troubled Vietnam veteran. The police promised that his brother would receive treatment in prison. Instead, he was sentenced to death.

**BILL BABBITT:**

Then I had to go back to my family, go back to my mother, and say they're going to try to kill Manny, they want to kill Manny.

*Performance clip – Orth sings "Do you honestly feel that this monster deserves to live..."*

**SISTER HELEN:**

There is deep conflict, of course, in my experiences with death row inmates on the one hand and victim's families on the other and how to bridge that between the two.

*Performance clip – You Don't Know*

**SISTER HELEN**

True art, I think, brings you over to both sides of a conflict, and all you do is just bring people there.

*“You Don’t Know” in performance - Von Stade joins parents*

**JAKE HEGGIE:**

They all wound up on stage singing the same music cause in a way they're all dealing with the same issue: having lost a child, about to lose a child, ...dealing with that pain.

*Combine “You Don’t Know” Scenes from workshop, full Performance  
Back to final run-through ‘99: “Shut the door”*

*After audience applauds and people hug each other, CUT to RECEPTION*

**NARRATION:** The very private workshop performance of “Dead Man walking” was followed by elation – and relief.

**PATRICK SUMMERS:**

What this showed us is that we have the grand architecture of it already, which is the hardest thing to achieve.

**LOTFI:** Whew! That was good!

**TERRENCE McNALLY**

This to me is kind of the most important day in many ways. This is when the opera was born. Next year it will be shown around one year old with its, you know, first suit and getting to walk. Today was a birth.

Fade out on wide shot of the reception.

**ACT TWO – FROM THE GROUND UP...one year later.**

**Sam Fleming in planning meeting:** For Joe de Rocher, uh, I had a little meeting with John about his hair, John Packard, and he is gonna be able to grow it this long, and have one of those, I call it hockey hair—Joe calls it a mullet, yeah. And it’s this style of shirt we want for him....

**Lotfi Mansouri:** Actually, that’s the way that Packard looks...

**SAM FLEMING, Costume Designer**

When you work on a new work that’s based on anything that’s even remotely historical, it gets a little more, um, tricky. Because there’s so much more material around that everyone can access. They can read the book. They can see the movie.

**Sam Fleming:** In the production we’re not gonna use, these actual tattoos, but I think the layout of how they are is good for when he’s doing his push-ups, But we want to make sure we get this one in, ‘cause that’s the Arayan Nations and they’re actually gonna be pretty much like tattoos done in prison, which is done not too well, because they have very bad equipment, because it’s all illegal.

*Packard getting tattoos applied to:*

*Packard singing “Everything is gonna be all right” in rehearsal and performance*

**JAKE HEGGIE:**

John Packard is very clear with his character... He'd taken a trip to Angola and he'd seen death row, he'd been on the car ride out there, and I think it deeply, deeply affected him and his idea of the character...

*Shots of Packard driving to Angola, going in the gate, etc...*

**JOHN PACKARD**

You can read a lot of books about prisons, watch movies, but when they called me and said that you have an opportunity to come down here to the actual prison...that's something that I think I have to experience...

*Slo mo footage of JOHN PACKARD visiting Angola Prison, with clanking, metallic noises of doors shut, keys jangled, and locks turned, to emphasize the harshness of the prison.*

**SISTER HELEN**

There are no soft sounds in prison. It's all cement floors, // bars, // people yelling, voices reverberating.

*Shots of PACKARD in the cell, being manacled, shuffling walk with leg irons.*

**JOHN PACKARD:**

I'm going to try to feel like what those guys go through... Every time he was out of a cell // he is in manacles // no control // trapped.

*Packard walks “the walk” from cell into injection chamber – intercut with music and shots from the opera.*

**JOHN PACKARD:** *Packard in the visiting room at Angola*

I'm going to be living this character for two months. // He has to come a long way // from, from truly an evil guy, to somebody that the audience is going to care about. That's going to be the most difficult thing about this role.

*Cut to performance shot of Packard & Graham in visiting room – dissolve to set model of visiting room.*

**NARRATION:** To support the intensity of the characters, the designers had to capture the emotional truth of the settings.

*Sound up discussion of set with the two chairs in the visiting room facing out.*

**Michael Yeargan (with set models)**

The guards bring in two chairs, and they just in, like, separate pools of light, and they can sing out just as we set up in the first scene.

**Lotfi Mansouri:** Without any kind of realistic conversation. (“NO”) Which is good... I like that, I like that.

**MICHAEL YEARGAN,** Set Designer

The most difficult thing with an opera as intimate as this one is, the fact that you do have a large stage to deal with. // I see it very, very simple and very stark.

*Montage with “rock & roll” music of stage hands moving sets, etc.*

**MARK URBAN**, Key Stage Carpenter

The very first piece we had, we checked it and everything, we ended up moving it three-quarters of an inch or else the elevator wouldn't have worked. // When we do a show that we've already done, we can basically come here and bang it up, // This is definitely more difficult // this went together pretty well this morning // and there's nothing to say that things won't move as soon as the director and the designer see it on stage.

*CUT to Coke Machine being brought in. Set model to stage reality.*

**MICHAEL YEARGAN:** This is the moment when this red coke machine comes in. It's really kind of the only color that we really see in the whole evening. And it takes on this whole hallucination. You see the inmates – he's also putting the murdered children in the boxes. He's got the families in the boxes.

**LOTFI** ...Her (Sister Helen's) different visions...very strong to get that hallucination...

*We see Jennifer Tipton on stage discussing lighting*

**Jennifer Tipton:** "Let's change 70 and 73".

*Then a montage of various silhouette shots of the set*

**JENNIFER TIPTON** Lighting designer

We thought about putting fluorescences in the boxes in each cell, and it just seemed like, first of all if wouldn't work very well, second of all it would be hard to mask it, and, so...Michael Yeargan and I said, well it should just be a silhouette // In a sense that established a theme that was used throughout the piece...// slashes and silhouettes and I would say cold light and also the use of the boxes,

*CUT to WAITING ROOM WITH COKE MACHINE, OPENING NIGHT, as we see the impressive set, huge cast, and hear the powerful music as Sister Helen hallucinates.*

**MICHAEL YEARGAN:** We can accumulate all of those images and surround her with it. Almost like a Ferris wheel going around her or something. The whole thing is overwhelming for her.

*CUT to black or FADE OUT at end of performance*

*FADE IN to PANELISTS stepping up to the platform and assembling themselves, joking and laughing as they do.*

**NARRATION:** The designers and performers knew the opera world well. However, Director Joe Mantello, a veteran of Broadway and off-Broadway, had never directed an opera before.

**JOE MANTELLO:** Stage Director

I remember running around the opera house saying to anyone who would listen, now, you know, I don't read music, I know nothing about music, I don't know, I, I have no vocabulary for music, it. And, and I kept being reassured that um, that this was going to be fine and that there were people there that were going to get me through this and, and so. And it was a year away, so it was abstract enough that I could, and I think I just put it out of my head until the day that I got to San Francisco and I actually had to walk into the room, and I remember being on the phone with a friend of mine going, 'I've made a really bad mistake.' [LAUGHTER] There are 60 people waiting in a room. And you know, the one thing that I do know is that performers smell fear on the director. [LAUGHTER]

*Visual montage of JOE MANTELLO working with the performers.*

**NARRATION:** When Joe Mantello and the principal singers began rehearsals, it was only one month before the premiere. They set out to bring together two worlds— theater and opera – to create a new work of art.

**SUSAN GRAHAM**

Joe Mantello is, is very concerned with realism and a very natural approach...

*Intercut portions of Hope House rehearsal*

**SUSAN GRAHAM** In order to do that, we have to cut away a lot of traditional operatic grandeur, and we have to be very pure. Even though these are bigger than life issues and bigger than life emotions, our delivery of them has to be very straightforward.

*Graham, Packard, Mantello in rehearsal:*

**Packard:** I hate it when you sound like a nun.....

**Graham:** Forget that I'm a nun

**Packard:** I hate it when you sound like a nun.

**Mantello:** And then they come in and then they start to sort of get into a rhythm, with the truth will set you free....

**THERESA HAMM-SMITH:** Joe didn't come with all of that heavy, stuffy, opera stuff. You know, he, he...uh...really gave a lot of room for personal interpretation. I liked the simplicity of the way he worked. That seemed right for this particular piece.

*Mantello working with Theresa*

*Scene of John Packard doing push-ups; and Mantello and Packard on stage*

**JOE MANTELLO**

Early on, the second day and I was watching John doing all this stuff to let the audience know that this is a bad man. But it actually had nothing to do with John himself. I said, there's something that's stopping you – he's not real to you, he's a type – he exists in the abstract to you // I think you have to locate yourself in him somehow and embrace either what's human about him and show us what's repellent about him and let us make up our minds.

*Mantello with cast members*

**TERRENCE McNALLY**

To me a new play, I think a new opera even more...

*On camera...*is like trying to grow an orchid in Alaska. You know, they're very, very delicate, and you really do need the right team. If you don't have that chemistry, I don't think a new piece succeeds.

*Cut to rehearsal where the family meets Joe for the last time, and the performers confer with JOE MANTELLO about how to stand for the family photo*

**Mantello:** I just want to look at this pose a second.

**Von Stade:** I think she would—if I were her—I'd put myself next to Joe “OK” .Is that okay? “Gather round me, boys”

**Mantello:** What I'm looking for is for someone to be, right now it's a line

**Von Stade:** Put him in front

**Mantello:** That's good.. that's much better

*Performance scene of family photo with orchestra music*

**FREDERICA VON STADE**

It's so close to me, you know. I have kids and, I'm playing my own age. It's a part I wanted to play because the worst thing that's asked of any parent is to lose a child in any way. But one step worse is to feel that you're responsible in some way for your child's fate, you know.

*Pardon Board performance:: Von Stade singing*

**JAKE HEGGIE**

When I worked with Flicka Von Stade // she was telling me which lines, which musical and vocal lines to her defined her character. She was, "there it is—right there." ("Don't Kill My Joe") It's in the first scene that she has, the pardon board hearing where she says, 'I just don't know what good my Joe's being dead will do.'

*Pardon Board performance continued: Von Stade singing: "Because nothing can undo what's happened. Nothing."*

**BILL BABBITT**

My brother was a person who served two tours of duty in Vietnam, suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, saw five major campaigns in Vietnam, was awarded the Purple Heart in shackles at San Quentin Prison. // We were looking for clemency for Manny, and that clemency meant life in prison without the possibility of parole.

**WILLIAM AUGUST**

I personally don't think life in prison is enough for this type of crime. Why should you spend the rest of your life whether it's in prison or outside of prison - alive, when you just have taken a number of lives?

*Pardon Board Hearing scene. "Comb from my boy...." "She's talking about the man who stabbed my daughter 37 times in the throat....."*

**ROBERT ORTH**

I feel it's very valid to play the point of view of a person in that position, 'cause I don't know how I'd feel if someone killed my kid. I might want him dead!

**JAMES ANDERSON**

Most of the guys who get a death penalty have been down the block once or twice before, and they've got a, you know, an escalating pattern of criminality. So, you know, I mean, they've had their chances with prison and it hasn't worked.

**BETTY CARLSON**

He's fed, he's clothed, he's housed, he has medical care. Um, not so bad. The thing that stays with me is that he's alive and Frank is dead, and that doesn't change

*Von Stade sings "If I was that girl's father, I'd hate my boy too..... Haven't we all suffered enough....."*

**SISTER HELEN**

Victims' families are being treated like pariahs on one end of the spectrum, death row inmates are treated like pariahs on the other end. People are staying away from both.

*Von Stade's solo: Ask you to hate the crime and not the criminal...*

**SISTER HELEN**

The worse thing to do is to leave people isolated, because then they really do collapse. They can't heal.

*Von Stade's solo – Haven't we all suffered enough.*

**BETTY CARLSON**

I'm not sure what this man will face in eternity. But bottom line, I would rather be Frank's mother than his mother.

*Von Stade sings: "Haven't we all?" Ends with shot of angry parents*

**ACT THREE – TO THE PRECIPICE**

**MARC SCORCA**, President, Opera America

Doing a new work and attending the premiere performance is like looking at a novel in, in galley. That it's the first time you're looking at it. You can't proofread it. It's not performed time after time in an empty theatre or in previews the way a Broadway show is performed.

**TERRENCE McNALLY**

Joe and I have spent our lives working in the theater. We're used to previews for, like, weeks getting it right. Operas are basically shot out of the cannon at the audience.

*Shots of tech people, silhouettes, other strangely lit backstage scenes*

**NARRATION:** As the premiere drew close, the eyes of the opera world turned to San Francisco. The premiere performance was already sold out, and public expectations were running high. The cast was deep in rehearsal.

*Rehearsal starts & stops: "Stop please" over and over and over... "Let's go back, Susan tosses handkerchief. Susan on heels, tilt up to tapping fingers on purse*

**JAKE HEGGIE**

I'd say the biggest challenge has been actually in the amount of time we've had on stage. //(Stop please, stop please, ouch!) I kept having people come up to me and saying, 'why aren't you just running this, why aren't you just running the show?' We've just gotten onto the stage...this is our first time trying this.

*More stopping/starting rehearsing: "Can we just hold one second, Patrick, I'm sorry.."*

**PATRICK SUMMERS**

This rehearsal is always agony for me, because we never get to do more than 10 bars of music. But that's, you know, that's what this rehearsal is like.

*Backstage scenes: "OK, good!"*

**LOTFI MANSOURI**

There are 27 scenes, and you have to routine it. And that's been rather difficult because it has elevators, things going up and down that have to be timed to the music. // I always say that if I end up by getting 50% of what I'd hoped for at the beginning, I think I'm doing very well.

**JOHN PACKARD**

That doesn't work, this works. It's very intense that way. But it's especially intense cause the characters are so intense.

*Overhead shot of visiting room to short performance: “And Joseph de Rocher, 95281 is history!”*

**JOHN PACKARD:** With Helen, every single scene that we do is a different flavor, a different color, a different moment, but they’re very intense.

**SUSAN GRAHAM**

I’m on stage nearly the whole time, ...it’s not an easy role. It’s not an easy opera. It’s not easy to go there emotionally and quite frankly it’s daunting.

*CUT to scene change at the beginning of **Helen’s Bedroom** scene, the duet between Sr. Helen and Sr. Rose about forgiveness*

**THERESA HAMM-SMITH**

The bedroom scene is a really special moment, and actually for Helen it’s the turning point where she gets to the other side of forgiveness.

*Bedroom scene with Sister Rose and Helen continues*

**SUSAN GRAHAM**

It’s just about two good friends sitting up late at night talking about a really tricky subject: personal forgiveness.

*Continue duet*

**SUSAN GRAHAM**

Forgiveness comes in many forms. Forgiveness can be something as simple as, you know, the touch of a hand or a look in the eye...

*Duet ends*

**BETTY CARLSON**

Forgiveness is a monumental step that I still have to take. I come closer to it but I haven’t completely reached it.

**BILL BABBITT:**

I asked my brother, during, before he was arraigned for murder, I says, ‘Manny, I’m sorry but we’re going to get you the help you needed.’ I said, ‘please forgive me, Brother.’ He said to me, ‘Brother, all is forgiven.’ So that was my first taste of forgiveness right there.

**WILLIAM AUGUST**

I could never forgive him. I could never forget, and I could never forgive him. And I have seen parents who have been able to do that, and I have not been able to bring myself to that stage.

*Susan Graham and Bob Orth duet over the difficulty of forgiveness.*

**SISTER HELEN**

When they say, ‘I can’t forgive,’ a lot of times because they’re dealing with so much they only have their anger in the beginning to keep them going,

*Duet continues: “I’m sorry”*

**SISTER HELEN** : ... 'cause they'd commit suicide, they'd implode from the sorrow and the grief.

*CUT to TV News coverage of testimony as Manny Babbitt sought clemency.*

Grandson: If any man deserves to be executed and to face his demons, it's Manuel Babbitt. We have waited 18 years for justice to prevail. The time has come for his life to end.

Son: Babbitt beat my mother to death. He beat to death a little old lady, not a Vietnam adversary, as has been contended.

**SISTER HELEN**

If somebody killed my mother, somebody killed my loved one, I might be standing right where you are. Because you've lost someone, you know. // The ones who help them get through are other people who have been through that same journey themselves, they are the only ones who can talk to them about making a journey out of the other side.

**BETTY CARLSON**

If I were in a room with the prisoner and he was confined by chain or whatever to a chair and my choice of weapons was on the table and I had the opportunity to terminate his life, I couldn't do it. So why should I ask society to do something for me that I cannot do for myself?

**JAMES ANDERSON**

The criminal who is facing the death penalty has declared war on society. And I think it is society's way of payback. It's strict punishment, nothing else.

**MIKE FARRELL**

Most advanced nations in the world, with the exceptions, the sparse and frustrating exception of the United States, have given up the death penalty because they understand that it doesn't serve any social purpose.

**BETTY CARLSON**

I have never wanted this man's life. I just don't want him out.

**BILL BABBITT**

I was shocked when, when we realized that my brother's time was running out and that the governor was not going to grant clemency because he was worried about closure for the other victim.

*Von Stade sings her farewell to her son (rehearsal)*

**BETTY CARLSON**

It doesn't just effect the perpetrator and the victim. It's like a pebble in a pool. You drop a pebble and all the concentric circles come beyond that pebble. It touches everybody's life, and you can chose to let it color your life with bitterness and unhappiness, or it can color your life with good things that you can do to help others so that perhaps it won't happen again. That's what we've tried to do.

*Rehearsal of Waiting Room – Last Family Visit continues–, reminds him of his childhood. “ Still smiling ... ”*

**JAMES ANDERSON:**

Let's face it, jurors aren't really enamored of sentencing somebody to death. // And I would really, really hate to have to be the one to be put in that position but if I'm selected, I would hate to do it, but if the evidence is there, I will go and do it.

**SISTER HELEN:**

How can we put this God job on people that only have human consciousness and wisdom and all the frailties?

*Death walk music starts to build*

**BILL BABBITT**

I want to get the word out about the pain. Ask anybody about the pain. Stop and think about the pain. This could happen to you. It could be someone you know, someone you love. You better hope they're not black. You better hope they're not poor. You hear?

*CUT to preparations for Joe de Rocher's execution, singing "Thy Kingdom Come"*

**BILL BABBITT**

As we approach the door to the death chamber we had to walk through a gauntlet of correctional officers, and I saw compassion and hurt in their eyes. And I wanted them to know that my family forgives them for being a part of this murder. It's like I'm an accomplice to my brother's demise.

*Execution scenes from performance continue*

**SISTER HELEN**

The execution in the opera is done in complete silence – an opera! It's the only way fully you can attend to the reality of what's going on, that a human being is being killed in front of your eyes.

*Joe lying on execution table, dies. Graham sings "He will gather us around..."*

*Curtains rise, applause, bows, backstage hugs – all slo-mo*

*Cut to candlelight vigil outside of the opera house on opening night. Sister Helen is walking down the line shaking hands with the protestors.*

**SISTER HELEN**

What this experience is about, and the reflection that it leads to is to look at different options. Is it the only thing we can do? To imitate the worst possible behavior of people who've killed, and to say justice demands that we kill you? Is that the only thing we can do as a society or are there alternatives? Art helps us explore alternatives, to make new choices and brings us to that deeper place to do that.

*Final scene is SUSAN GRAHAM singing, "make me strong, make me wise, make me human...amen."*

*Candles*

*Quiet fade to black*

**THE END**

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