

# The Boston Opera Collaborative Presents

## To Hell and Back

Music by Jake Heggie  
Libretto by Gene Scheer

May 11, 2019 - 7pm  
Arlington St. Church

Jake Heggie's, one-act opera, *To Hell and Back*, is a sensitive and beautiful contemporary exploration of abuse, redemption, and empowerment told through the lens of the Ancient Greek myth of *the Rape of Persephone*. The performance will be followed by a talk-back featuring speakers from the Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry's domestic violence safehouse, which will provide resources about how to identify and combat domestic violence for people and relationships within any demographic. 20% of all ticket proceeds will be donated to UUUM's domestic violence safehouse.

*In order to help you best prepare for the opera, please note that "To Hell and Back" contains sensitive material referencing intimate partner violence.*

Scene 1: A Phone Call and a Letter from Arizona

Scene 2: Anne's Lament (Cyanne's Lament)

Scene 3: The Queen of Hell

Scene 4: The Garden

Scene 5: Anne's Decision

### **Collaborative Team:**

Ann Fogler, mezzo-soprano

Jennifer Soloway, soprano

Jean Collier, pianist and Music Director

Patricia-Maria Weinmann, Stage Director

Melanie Bacaling, Assistant Stage Director

Sasha Shapiro, Visual Artist

Sarah Zimmer, Domestic Violence Advocate

Greta Hagen, Director of Development at UUUM

Christine Dickerson, Volunteer Coordinator at UUUM

Hannah Stohler, Director of Believe in Success at UUUM

Anna Borroz, Assistant Manager of Renewal House at UUUM

Link to Bios: <https://www.bostonoperacollaborative.org/to-hell-and-back>

*By arrangement with Bent Pen Music, Inc., publisher and copyright holder. Bill Holab Music: Sole Agent*

### **Notes from the Music Director: Jean Collier**

Jake Heggie's *To Hell and Back* was commissioned in 2006 for the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra of the Bay Area for a concert of baroque music. Musically, it is an unusual work, for several reasons. Since a Baroque orchestra commissioned it (one that specializes in the music of Bach, Handel, and other Baroque composers), Heggie used the instruments that would have been used in the baroque period, while keeping the harmonic language modern. One character sings in an operatic style while the other uses musical theater technique; some music is reminiscent of musical theater, while other sections reflect the turbulent emotions of the situations and sound like modern classical music.

The 40-minute piece unfolds in five scenes, with musical motives that recur throughout. The musical writing brilliantly reflects the shifting dramatic situations: the orchestra's overture establishes the tension and drama of Stephanie's situation, the music of the gardening scene is simple, serene, and tuneful, and Stephanie's aria features a playful, free interplay between voice and orchestra. Heggie thus toggles effortlessly between the worlds of classical music, baroque music, and musical theater, all the while writing beautifully for the voice and never letting technique get in the way of the storytelling.

### **Notes from the Stage Director: Patricia-Maria Weinmann**

Jake Heggie, one of America's most celebrated and notable composers of contemporary opera, has created a masterpiece with his *To Hell and Back*. This compact work vividly portrays the terrible choices that two women face: Stephanie, a young woman caught in a terrifying, violent marriage, and her mother-in-law, Anne, who is faced with the horrible reality of her abusive son. As both women create a bond, the tension mounts as Anne decides that she must save Stephanie.

The plot is based on the Greek myth of Persephone, who is dragged to the depths of Hell by the god, Pluto (Hades). Her mother, the goddess Demeter, pleads for her daughter's release. Pluto relents, allowing Persephone to join her mother for three seasons of the year; she will stay in Hades with him for one—the barren, dark season of winter. There are frequent mythological references, including the water nymph, Cyanne, who attempted to stop Persephone's abduction, failed, and with her tears, turned into a gentle river. Anne claims that Peter, her son, will blame his childhood and castigate his brother, who was given the "heavens". This references Zeus and Pluto, dividing the spoils of their father, Cronus, with Zeus taking the sky and Pluto, the underworld. This use of mythology enriches not only the libretto but the emotional impact of the storytelling.

Anne, as the mother-in-law, is a deeply sympathetic character; the tormented bystander who waits until it is almost too late, but gathers her strength and courage, and ultimately takes action.

### **Notes from the performers:**

#### *Ann Fogler:*

Anne's character development is at the center of Heggie's *To Hell and Back*. She is the bystander in Stephanie's abuse story, and her hesitation to intervene derives from the complex reality that her own son, whom she remembers fondly as a child, has become the violent abuser. Performing the role of Anne has reminded me that making the "right" choice is not always obvious or easy. As she states clearly in her aria, Stephanie "can leave [her] husband. But how [does she] leave [her] son?" Anne's pain ripples through her musical voice, allowing us a glimpse into what propels her to make her final decision.

#### *Jennifer Soloway:*

*To Hell and Back* is a show that holds a very dear place in my heart. Stephanie was the very first roll that I performed in graduate school and getting the chance to re-explore this character now almost four years later has been an amazing experience. Stephanie's story is one of tragedy but ultimately of hope. The first time I performed this piece I was so taken aback by the sadness and horror of her story, and this is what I focused on and latched onto as a performer. However, this second time I have found her strength and courage. I hope that with the advantage of some age and, hopefully, some gained wisdom I am able to present all of Stephanie, not just her pain and hurt but her courage, strength and resilience as well.