

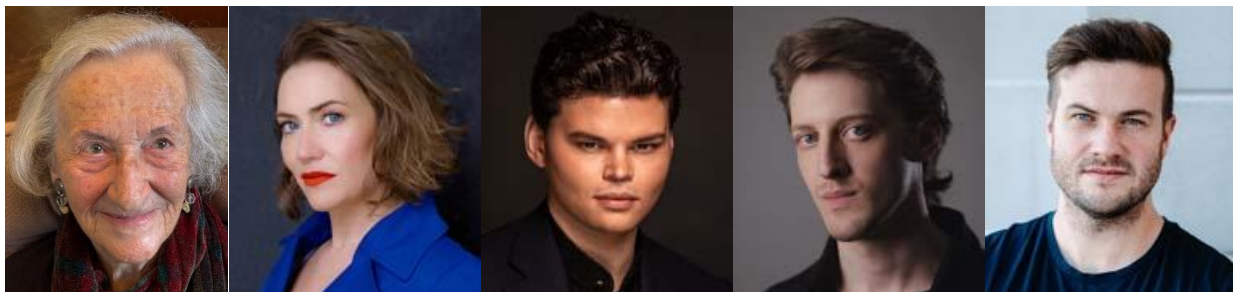


SAN FRANCISCO OPERA PRESENTS *MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS*
War Memorial Opera House, September 20–October 4



Scene from *Mary, Queen of Scots* with Heidi Stober. Photo: Ellie Kurttz/English National Opera
Clelia Cafiero (conductor); Stewart Laing (director and production designer)

**Thea Musgrave's 1977 opera returns to San Francisco in a new co-production
by Stewart Laing, conducted by Clelia Cafiero and starring Heidi Stober**



Thea Musgrave (composer); Heidi Stober (Mary); Thomas Mole (James Stewart);
Christopher Sokolowski (Lord Darnley); Thomas Kinch (Earl of Bothwell)

Tickets available at (415) 864-3330 and sfopera.com
September 26 performance will be livestreamed

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (August 26, 2026) — Scottish-born composer Thea Musgrave's 1977 opera, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, returns to San Francisco in a new co-production between San Francisco Opera and English National Opera by director and designer **Stewart Laing**. Italian conductor **Clelia Cafiero** makes her Company debut leading the San Francisco Opera Orchestra and a cast headed by soprano **Heidi Stober** in the title role. Chorus Director **John Keene** prepares the San Francisco Opera Chorus.

Mary, Queen of Scots, the fifth of composer Thea Musgrave's 11 operas to date, explores the fight for political survival of one of history's most iconic queens amid the determination of three men to usurp her power. Romantic playwright Friedrich Schiller, bel canto composer Gaetano Donizetti and numerous 20th-century novelists and filmmakers have all woven stories around Mary's execution at the order of her cousin Elizabeth I. Musgrave's opera, on the other hand, focuses on the young Mary's contentious reign in Scotland and her constant fight to retain her throne as three men—her half-brother, second husband and a potential ally (and ultimately her third husband)—all vie to control her and appropriate her power. Her libretto juxtaposes scenes of public unrest and court intrigue with the gentle normalcy of motherhood as Mary sings a lullaby to her baby, the future king of Scotland and England, James I. Musgrave's incisive score propels the turbulent events of the Queen's reign with dramatic urgency and soaring lyricism.

Musgrave's opera was introduced at the 1977 Edinburgh International Festival, where it enjoyed critical and popular success. The U.S. premiere of *Mary, Queen of Scots* followed in 1978 at Virginia Opera under the baton of Peter Mark, Musgrave's husband and artistic and general director of the Company from 1975–2010. Musgrave, who was then a faculty member at the University of California Santa Barbara, conducted the opera's West Coast premiere for San Francisco Opera affiliate Spring Opera Theater in April 1979 at the Curran Theatre.

Known for the clarity of her invention, the skill of her orchestrations and the power of her musical communication, **Thea Musgrave** has consistently explored new means of projecting dramatic situations in her music. Her large-scale and chamber operas of the past 50 years include *The Voice of Ariadne* (1973); *Mary, Queen of Scots* (1977); *A Christmas Carol* (1979); *Harriet, The Woman Called Moses* (1984); *Simón Bolívar* (1992) and *Pontalba* (2003). The immense diversity of her music has been showcased in major retrospectives, including the BBC's Total Immersion weekend in 2014 and the Stockholm International Composer Festival 2018 where fifteen of her orchestral and chamber works were performed in four concerts. She has been the recipient of numerous awards including two Guggenheim Fellowships, the Ivors Classical Music Award 2018 and The Queen's Medal for Music. Approaching her 100th year in 2028, Musgrave's centenary will be celebrated with concerts, performances and events worldwide honoring the composer's remarkable life in music.

San Francisco Opera's first-performed opera by a female composer—Musgrave's *Mary, Queen of Scots*—returns this season for its mainstage premiere in director and designer **Stewart Laing's** production. Co-lit by designers **D.M. Wood** and **Mimi Jordan Sherin**, the production was first presented by English National Opera in 2025. *The Standard* said of the production, which highlights sectarian violence in contemporary Scottish life: "Musgrave's libretto highlights very contemporary issues such as who brings political stability, who brings peace, the competing claims of rich and

poor, and Laing's modern setting allows such questions to resonate." Company Dance Master Colm Seery is the production's choreographer.

The Guardian praised rising Italian conductor **Clelia Cafiero's** 2024 debut with English National Opera conducting *La Bohème* for "drawing out luxurious richness from the strings and some elegantly shaped woodwind solos. Cafiero's sense of pace ... made for an extremely compelling performance." Along with making her Company debut leading *Mary, Queen of Scots*, Cafiero will conduct Puccini's *Tosca* in Summer 2027.

Heidi Stober returns to the role of the Scottish queen after winning acclaim as Mary at the London Coliseum in 2025: "Centre stage throughout is Mary, whose determination to bring peace to Scotland despite the forces mounted against her was portrayed with absolute conviction by the soprano Heidi Stober, who was outstanding in the role. Her set pieces in each act were especially powerful, notably the resolute Act 2 aria 'I stand alone,' which concludes with a rare but defiant major triad and ringing top notes" (*Opera*). Known to Bay Area audiences through her many vivid portrayals on the War Memorial Opera House stage, the *San Francisco Chronicle* said of Stober in 2022: "[Her] appearances with the Company have been reliable sources of joy ever since her 2010 debut in Massenet's *Werther*. But her performance as Blanche [in Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*] added a new and even deeper level of psychological specificity to her expected vocal brilliance."

British baritone **Thomas Mole** makes his American debut as Mary's calculating half-brother James Stewart. Mole, who returns later this fall as Count Almaviva in San Francisco Opera's presentation of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, was hailed by *Opera Now* for his starring role in the recent Glyndebourne Festival revival of Britten's *Billy Budd*, "His prison cell scene, as he awaits execution, was pitch perfect, tender emotion delivered without undue pathos—and all done with his hands tied behind his back!"

Current San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow tenor **Thomas Kinch** portrays the Earl of Bothwell, a powerful lowland baron, would-be protector of the queen and eventually her third husband. Kinch's performances with the Company have included Don José in Bizet's *Carmen*, roles in Wagner and Mozart operas, and, most recently, the officer in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. Following the 2025 Adler Fellows concert, the *San Francisco Chronicle* said, "the young heroic tenor Thomas Kinch sang with spectacular power and dark-toned beauty."

Christopher Sokolowski makes his Company debut as Mary's second husband, Lord Darnley. Sokolowski has distinguished himself in a wide repertoire, including Szymanowski's *King Roger* where he "approached an ideal" in the role of the mysterious Shepherd. "His glowing, youthful voice rang forth with great dramatic power and boasted an incisive masculine timbre that lent a touch of requisite eroticism" (*Opera*).

Baritone **Hadleigh Adams** portrays the musician and secretary to the queen, David Riccio; bass **David Soar** is Cardinal Beaton; current Adler Fellow baritone **Olivier Zerouali** is the Earl of Morton; tenor **Chance Jonas-O'Toole** is the Earl of Ruthven; bass-baritone **Philip Skinner** is Lord Gordon; and Mary's four eponymous ladies-in-waiting are performed by Adler Fellows **Sadie Cheslak** (Mary Seton), **Sofia Gotch** (Mary Beaton), **Mary Hoskins** (Mary Livingston) and **Alexa Frankian** (Mary Fleming).

Thea Musgrave said:

"I am thrilled to have my opera *Mary, Queen of Scots* return to San Francisco Opera this fall. I have always felt it to be the cornerstone of my operatic repertoire. It is also very close to me personally as I am a woman, a Scot and lived for several years in Paris. It was therefore easier for me than others to get inside of Mary's feelings as the 18-year-old widowed Queen of France returning to Scotland as the Scottish Queen. Mary grew quickly to hold her own in a land menaced by the conflicting ambitions of the men that surrounded her—only in the end—ironically to be defeated and brought down by a woman, Queen Elizabeth I. Happily, Mary won the long game when her son, James VI of Scotland, became James I of England and Scotland on Elizabeth's death. I am hoping my opera will likewise continue to bring her valor, her strength and particularly her emotional journey to life in a meaningful way for today's audiences at San Francisco Opera."



Composer and conductor Thea Musgrave rehearsing her opera *Mary, Queen of Scots* in 1979; Claudia Cummings in the title role of the 1979 production. Photos: Robert Messick (l), Ron Scherl (r)

Performed in English with English supertitles, the six performances of *Mary, Queen of Scots* are scheduled for September 20 (2 p.m.), 24 (7:30 p.m.), 26 (7:30 p.m.), 29 (7:30 p.m.); October 2 (7:30 p.m.), 4 (2 p.m.), 2026.

LIVESTREAM: Saturday, September 26

The Saturday, September 26 performance of *Mary, Queen of Scots* will be livestreamed at 7:30 p.m. PT and available to watch on demand for 48 hours beginning on Sunday, September 27 at 10 a.m.

PT. Tickets for the livestream and on-demand viewing are \$25 or \$125 for all six operas during the 2026–27 Season. For tickets and more information, visit sfopera.com/digital.

POST-PERFORMANCE TALKBACK WITH EUN SUN KIM: Sunday, October 4



Eun Sun Kim; Clelia Cafiero

Following the final performance of *Mary, Queen of Scots* on Sunday, October 4, San Francisco Opera Music Director Eun Sun Kim will host a post-performance talkback. Her special guest will be *Mary, Queen of Scots* conductor Clelia Cafiero. Ticketholders are invited to gather for this discussion about the work that goes into presenting operas, from the pit to the stage and behind the scenes.

PRE-OPERA TALKS

Composer Anne Hege presents a 20-minute overview of *Mary, Queen of Scots* beginning 55 minutes prior to each performance for ticketholders. An audio recording of the talk will be made available at sfopera.com/mary-queen-of-scots.

TICKETS AND INFORMATION

Tickets for *Mary, Queen of Scots* are priced from \$30 to \$456. Subscriptions for San Francisco Opera's 2026–27 Season are priced from \$136 to \$2,634 for Full Series (6 productions), \$69 to \$1,743 for Half Series (2–4 productions) and a Design Your Own (DYO) option (minimum three operas). A \$2 per-ticket facility fee is included in Balcony 1, 2 and 3 zone prices; all other zones include a \$3 per-ticket facility fee. Contact the San Francisco Opera Box Office at 301 Van Ness Avenue, call (415) 864-3330 or visit sfopera.com. For information about subscriber benefits and special series subscriptions, including the Student & Teacher Series offering 50% off select Full, Half and DYO Series, visit sfopera.com/subscribe.

Tickets for the September 26 livestream and on-demand window of *Mary, Queen of Scots* are \$25. For more information, visit sfopera.com/digital.

The Dolby Family's *Opera for the Bay* \$10 tickets to *Mary, Queen of Scots* are available for Bay Area residents (home address zip code between 94000–95999) who have not purchased tickets in the past three seasons. Dolby tickets are limited to two tickets per eligible patron, and inventory is limited. For more information, visit sfopera.com/dolby.

The War Memorial Opera House is located at 301 Van Ness Avenue. Patrons are encouraged to use public transportation to attend San Francisco Opera performances. The War Memorial Opera House is within walking distance of the Civic Center BART/Muni Station and near the 5, 6, 49 and F Market Street bus lines. For public transportation information, visit bart.gov and sfmta.com.

Gifts of all sizes help create San Francisco Opera's programs and are greatly appreciated. To donate visit sfopera.com/donate.

All casting, programs, schedules and ticket prices are subject to change. For further information about San Francisco Opera's 2026–27 Season, visit sfopera.com.

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MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS CASTING AND CALENDAR

#U.S. Debut *San Francisco Opera Debut ♪Role Debut †Current Adler Fellow

◊Adler Fellowship Graduate +Merola Opera Program Graduate

All performances take place at the War Memorial Opera House (301 Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco), unless noted.

MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS by Thea Musgrave

September 20 (2 p.m.), 24 (7:30 p.m.), 26 (7:30 p.m.), 29 (7:30 p.m.); October 2 (7:30 p.m.), 4 (2 p.m.), 2026

Co-Production between San Francisco Opera and English National Opera

Libretto by the composer, based on Amalia Elguera's play *Moray*

Approximate running time: 3 hours, with 2 intermissions

Performed in English with English supertitles

World premiere: Edinburgh, King's Theatre; September 6, 1977
San Francisco Opera premiere: Curran Theatre; April 12, 1979 (Spring Opera Theater)

Cast:

<i>Mary, Queen of Scots</i>	Heidi Stober
<i>James Stewart, Earl of Moray</i>	Thomas Mole#♪
<i>James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell</i>	Thomas Kinch♪†+
<i>Henry, Lord Darnley</i>	Christopher Sokolowski*♪
<i>David Riccio</i>	Hadleigh Adams♪◊+
<i>Cardinal Beaton</i>	David Soar♪
<i>Lord Gordon</i>	Philip Skinner♪◊+
<i>Earl of Morton</i>	Olivier Zerouali♪†+
<i>Earl of Ruthven</i>	Chance Jonas-O'Toole♪+
<i>Mary Seton</i>	Sadie Cheslak♪†+
<i>Mary Beaton</i>	Sofia Gotch♪†+
<i>Mary Livingston</i>	Mary Hoskins♪†+

Mary Fleming
Lords
Crowd Member

Alexa Frankian♪♯+
William Lee Bryan♪, Michael Jankosky♪
Sally Mouzon♪

Creative Team:

Conductor	Clelia Caferio*
Director	Stewart Laing*
Production Designer	Stewart Laing*
Co-Lighting Designers	D.M. Wood, Mimi Jordan Sherin*
Choreographer	Colm Seery
Chorus Director	John Keene
Fight Director	Dave Maier
Intimacy Director	Maya Herbsman

San Francisco Opera Orchestra, San Francisco Opera Chorus, San Francisco Opera Dance Corps

San Francisco Opera is sponsored, in part, by Dr. & Mrs. William M. Coughran, Julie Dickson, Jerome & Thao Dodson, Dagmar Dolby, Carol & Dixon Doll, Bertie Bialek Elliott, The Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation for the Arts, Louise Gund, John A. & Cynthia Fry Gunn, The Jen-Hsun & Lori Huang Foundation, Franklin & Catherine* Johnson, Edmund W. & Jeannik Méquet Littlefield Fund, Bernard & Barbro Osher, Marieke & Jeff Rothschild, Jan Shrem* & Maria Manetti Shrem, Dianne Taube, Phyllis C. Wattis Endowment Funds, Diane B. Wilsey, Barbara A. Wolfe, and Anonymous (2). *deceased

Mary, Queen of Scots is made possible, in part, by The Phyllis C. Wattis Fund for New Productions, Marcia Barinaga & Corey Goodman, Louise Gund, John A. & Cynthia Fry Gunn, Jen-Hsun & Lori Huang Foundation and Marieke & Jeff Rothschild. Clelia Caferio's appearance is made possible by the Jan Shrem* & Maria Manetti Shrem Conductors Fund.

San Francisco Opera is supported, in part, by a grant from Grants for the Arts.



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PRESS PHOTOS: High-resolution, downloadable artist headshots and production images for *Mary, Queen of Scots* are available at sfopera.com/press.

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