

Mark Adamo first attracted national attention with his uniquely successful debut opera, *Little Women*, after the novel by Louisa May Alcott. Introduced by Houston Grand Opera in 1998, *Little Women* has since enjoyed over sixty national and international engagements. It is one of the most frequently performed North American operas. Comparable acclaim greeted the premiere of *Lysistrata*, or the *Nude Goddess*. *Lysistrata* was commissioned by Houston Grand Opera for its 50th anniversary and premiered in March 2005 with additional performances at New York City Opera in 2006. San Francisco Opera commissioned and premiered of his third full-length opera, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, in 2013.



Learn more about *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* at [www.musicsalesclassical.com](http://www.musicsalesclassical.com). Photos from the opera by

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# Mark Adamo

## Gospel of Mary Magdalene

An opera in two acts (2012)



" [A] DENSELY RHAPSODIC OPERA... LUSHLY BEAUTIFUL, SUFFUSED WITH RIPE TONAL HARMONIES AND URGENT, ARCHING MELODIES." - San Francisco Chronicle

# Gospel of Mary Magdalene

An opera in two acts (2012)

“A riveting dramatic experience.”

- Stephen Smoliar,  
*Examiner.com*



Music by Mark Adamo

Libretto by Mark Adamo

Orchestra: 3.3.3.3/4.3.3.1/

timp.2perc/hp.kbd/str(12.9.7.7.5)

Duration: 2 hours 30 minutes

Premiere: June 2013, San Francisco Opera

Kevin Newbury, director; Michael Christie, conductor; starring Sasha Cooke, Maria Kanyova, Nathan Gunn, and Will Burden.

## cast list

### PRINCIPAL ROLES

MIRIAM: *Soprano*

MARY MAGDALENE: *Mezzo-Soprano*

PETER: *Tenor*

YESHUA: *Baritone*

### NON-SINGING ROLES

JAMES and JOSES: *Sons of Mary*

A SQUAD OF POLICEMEN

TWO EXECUTIONERS

A SLAVE WOMAN

ONLOOKERS

### SATB CHORUS

*Supers (6M, 6F). The Audience*

### SECONDARY ROLES

PHARISEE: *Bass*

TWO POLICE: *Tenor, Baritone*

FOLLOWERS: *TTBB Quartet or Octet\**

### ENSEMBLE ROLES (under six lines)

TAMAR: *Soprano (can also sing Girl 1)*

THREE GIRLS: *2 Sopranos, Mezzo Soprano (Girl 2 or 3 can double Slave Woman)*

\*TWO PREACHERS: *2 Tenors (may also sing Followers 1 & 2)*

ONLOOKER: *Baritone (may also sing Follower 4)*

FISHMONGER: *Bass-baritone (may also sing Follower 4)*

## composer's note

Drawing on the Gnostic gospels, the canonical gospels, and fifty years of New Testament scholarship, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* reimagines the New Testament through the eyes of its lone substantial female character. At first, this Mary Magdalene, like so many moderns, searches for meaning and purpose in erotic love alone. But her entanglement with Jesus of Nazareth — as mentor, soulmate, and co-minister — teaches her to distinguish love from possession, even as it teaches him to see the moral dignity of women. Mary's clashes with Jesus's disciple Peter (minutely described in the Gnostic Gospels) suggest how the personal politics within Jesus's movement may have played out in its own place and time. And this opera imagines a version of Mary's vision at Jesus's tomb which — had it shaped the Christian story the way Peter's version of it did — might have left us a radically, radiantly different Western world.

By the fourth century, Christianity — now imperially triumphant — was carefully crafting its own masternarrative. Pointedly excluded from that narrative were the Gnostic Gospels, with their transformative visions of ethnic equality, of the soul-nourishing potential of sexual love; even, nascently, of the separation of church and state. At a moment when too many of us are still willing to use these stories to punish and exclude, rather than ennoble and unite, all of our fellow citizens, have we no need to re-examine these treasured but treacherous legends? Or might it be time to look again to *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*? — Mark Adamo, composer

## director's note

While formulating our approach to Mark Adamo's opera *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, my design team and I were inspired by images of religious archaeological sites in Israel and around the world and the various strata of humanity that such sights represent. The opera is about digging into one of the greatest stories ever told and uncovering an alternative — and equally valid — side of the narrative. Our visual approach presents a milieu that is both epic and intimate, both beautiful and foreboding. The set is an archeological dig site, complete with layers of earth, scaffolding, traps and arcades, and relics of ancient foundations and structures. The upper level is the realm of the modern chorus, who observe the Biblical action as it unfolds in the fenced-in bowl below. The “Seekers” — our narrative guides — travel between both realms. Soft-glowing lanterns are hung throughout the space, creating, in turn: a dig site, a star field, an intimate bedroom surround. The costumes are a mix of the modern and the ancient. The ancient clothing reflects both Jewish and Eastern influences while avoiding the typical, staid approach to Biblical drama. The opera vacillates between heightened, theatrical scenes and personal, naturalistic moments. As director, I am aiming to bring out the human side of these iconic characters while embracing the “magical” moments. Our approach to Mark Adamo's revelatory opera allows us flexibility, scale and intimacy while continuously drawing us back to the theme of digging into history... of searching for the missing story of Mary Magdalene. — Kevin Newbury, director