



MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM LAUNCHES MEROLA ARTISTS EMERGENCY FUND

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (2 April 2020) – To help its alumni who have suffered financial hardships brought on by COVID-19 (Coronavirus), the Merola Opera Program has launched the **Merola Artists Emergency Fund**. Available to Merola participants from the past five years (2015-2019), the fund is intended to assist young opera singers, conductors, and directors who are in the early stages of establishing their careers, and may be hardest hit by canceled performances in recent and coming months.

Board President Barbara Bruser Clark and Board Chairman Patrick Wilken said, “So many of our talented Merola participants have suddenly seen engagements evaporate for the next few months. They are in such a crucial period of launching their careers in opera houses around the world, and it is our goal to help them remain on course and fulfill their immense potential.” Merola already provides continuing support to its alumni for career development, making grants available for five years following an artist’s participation in the program to support everything from audition travel to headshots to vocal coaching, helping the young artists ease their transition to the professional opera world. This additional fund will specifically assist with lost wages, travel expenses, and other financial losses resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak.

In response to the Merola Board’s decision to support this campaign, San Francisco Opera Center Director and Merola Artistic Director Sheri Greenawald said, “This will be an extraordinarily valuable resource for Merolani struggling under the weight of many cancelations. It is an amazing, altruistic act by our board and the many supporters who are stepping up to contribute. On behalf of artists everywhere, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.”

Merola alumni who are eligible for this emergency fund have already been contacted with grant application guidelines. Several artists, who have lost contracts and scheduled appearances to sing at concert halls from The Met to Chateau de Versailles, responded with words of praise, including soprano Toni Marie Palmertree (Merola 2015) who replied, “I cannot help but write back immediately to express my gratitude. To everyone involved, thank you for thinking of us and supporting us in a time that Merola will also feel some loss,” with countertenor Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen (Merola 2016) adding, “The fund will make such a huge difference in my life, and in the lives of all recent Merolini.” Soprano Mary Evelyn Hangley (Merola 2016) also responded, to note, “Since completing the program, Merola has been the most supportive organization at every turn of my career.”

Individuals interested in supporting the Merola Artists Emergency Fund can visit merola.org/emergency-fund or email Executive Director Jean Kellogg at jkellogg@merola.org.

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MEDIA: Sydney Albin, Carla Befera & Co. PR
650.327.1200 | sydney@cb-pr.com

Ruben Pimentel, Merola Director of Marketing & Communications
415.936.2323 | rpimentel@merola.org