



Merola Commissions its First Opera

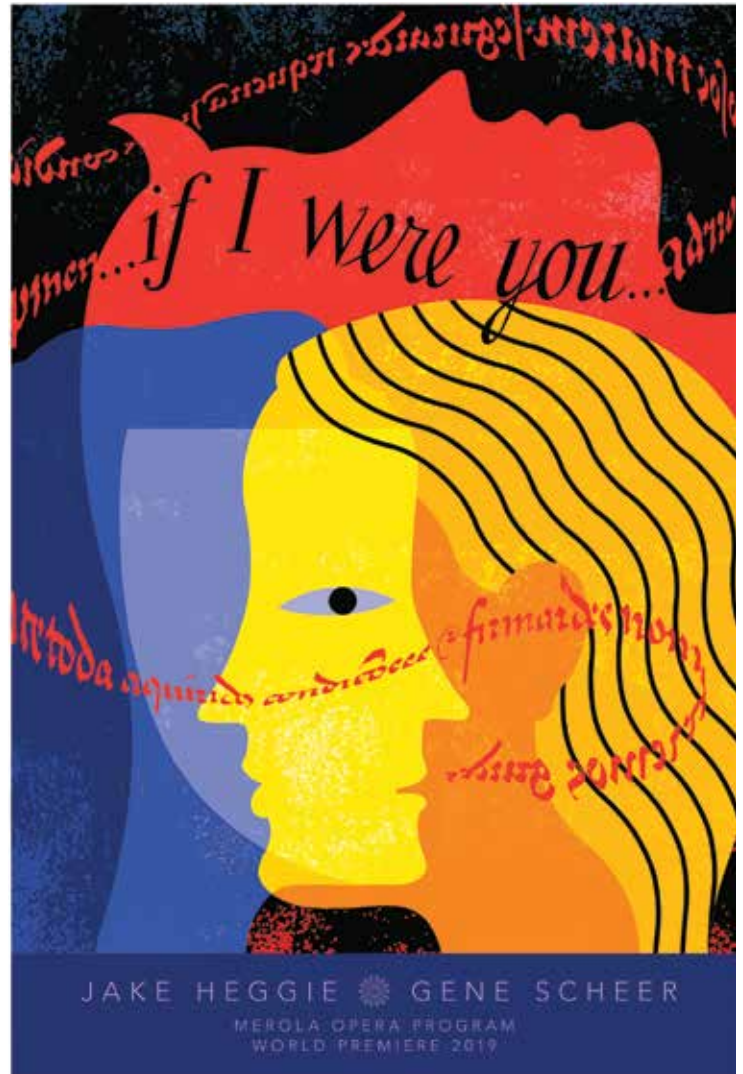
The summer of 2019 will mark a major milestone for Merola—the world premiere of our first-ever opera commission, *If I Were You*, by composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer.

It is difficult to find lyrical and challenging operas suited to young voices, especially works that do not involve a large chorus, and also with an orchestra of 30 musicians or less. With this in mind, Merola made the decision to commission a new opera suited to young voices. In looking for a composer, we immediately thought of the multi-talented Jake Heggie, who has a long history of working with Merola alumni.

If I Were You is based on a novel by Julien Green, who was born in Paris in 1900 to American parents. Green's work, written in French but heavily influenced by American authors such as Poe, Twain, Faulkner, Penn Warren, Welty, and Hawthorne, often deals with doppelgangers and the conflict between purity and passion. Gene Scheer's libretto updates the setting to the present day. It is a Faustian/Jekyll & Hyde story with an element of magical realism which is new ground for Heggie and Scheer. The story begins with the hero, Fabian, nearly dying in a car crash. The devil, in the guise of a beautiful, seductive woman, offers him the power to breathe his soul into another person so that he can live their life instead of his own. He can live forever this way, if he chooses, moving from body to body. As the shy Fabian becomes a wealthy older man, a young handsome brute, and eventually a young woman, the opera will deal with issues of age, power, sexual politics, and gender identity that are both timeless and very much part of the contemporary zeitgeist.

Jake says, "*If I Were You* has been one of the most challenging, inspiring and rewarding projects of my career—up there with *Dead Man Walking* and *Moby-Dick*. It is a big, dramatic, powerful story of identity, love, and loss that feels timely and timeless, American and universal, human and supernatural. After composing *It's A Wonderful Life*, I was hungry for a very different kind of project: one that would demand a dark, complicated psychology and poetry, and a musical language to match. A modern-day Faust story seemed just the thing: something in the world of magical realism that I have not yet explored. This score has pushed me into new territory as a composer and allowed me to find new levels of expression."

The world premiere will be double-cast to give more of our 2019 Merolini a chance to create roles in a new work. It will also give the 2019 apprentice coaches and apprentice stage director the opportunity to work directly with a composer and librettist on a new opera. With more and more opera companies premiering



new works, participating in a world premiere will be invaluable training for this group of young artists. *If I Were You* will also be a piece ideally suited to other training programs, conservatories, and regional opera companies, enriching the modern opera repertoire.

"It's always difficult to describe music in words," Jake says. "The whole point is for the music to take us to places that the words alone cannot. I feel the score to *If I Were You* does this. It creates an eerily beautiful soundscape filled with the arching, long-line lyricism I love and allows for great characters and deep drama to unfold in operatic terms. I can't think of an opera that is quite like it—which is both exciting and terrifying. But I feel it is very much an essential story for our time, and I'm on fire with the possibilities." 🌟

Martin Katz Master Class

JUNE 18, 2018



1 Xiaomeng Zhang; 2 Kendra Berentsen, Cheyanne Coss, Martin Katz, and Brittany Nickell; 3 Matthew Gemmill, James Maverick, Thomas Morris, Annie Brooks, Kseniia Polstiankina Barrad, Zhengyi Bai, Patricia Westley, Martin Katz, Alexandra Urquiola, Xiaomeng Zhang, and WooYoung Yoon; 4 Martin Katz and Patricia Westley

Warren Jones Master Class

JUNE 28, 2018



1 Warren Jones and Anne Maguire with Annie Brooks; 2 Warren Jones and Andrew Moore with James Maverick; 3 Charles Sy with Matthew Gemmill; 4 Christopher Colmenero, James Kelly, Zhengyi Bai, and Joan Kelly

From the Executive Director



At Merola we spend fall eagerly awaiting reports from Sheri Greenawald and Mark Morash as they crisscross the country auditioning for the next summer's Merolini. The 2019 Merola artists will be part of a milestone year for Merola—we will present the world premiere of our first-ever opera commission, *If I Were You* by composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer.

You'll find more information about this exciting project in these pages. We also take a look back at some favorite moments from productions, master classes, and events in our memorable 2018 summer. And we remember and pay tribute to Barbara Jackson, a wonderful friend to Merola who passed away in September, just shy of her 100th birthday.

I hope to see you at some of our off-season events in the fall and winter, such as the Schwabacher Recital Series (Merola sponsors three of them) and a special event that will offer members a sneak peek at *If I Were You*. Be sure to save the date for our 2019 Merola Spring Benefit Gala on April 13. (Further details are on pg. 8). In addition to the world premiere of *If I Were You*, the 2019 summer festival will feature the Schwabacher Summer Concert and of course will conclude with the Merola Grand Finale.

It will be an ambitious year for Merola, and we eagerly look forward to sharing it with all of you. 🌸

Happy Fall!

Warmest wishes,
Jean Kellogg

In Memoriam: Barbara Jackson



Julie Adams (Merola '14), Edward Nelson (Merola '14), and Leah Crocetto (Merola '08) with Barbara Jackson at a Rising Stars of Opera concert. Photo courtesy of U.C. Davis. Barbara Jackson with Brian Jagde (Merola '09).

Merola lost a devoted friend when Barbara Jackson passed away on September 7 at her home in Davis, less than a month shy of her 100th birthday.

Barbara was born in Texas in 1918. She came to Davis in 1951 when her husband W. Turrentine ("Turpie") Jackson, a noted historian specializing in the Western United States, took a faculty position at U.C. Davis. Barbara worked as a secretary in the department of English, dramatic art, and speech. An award-winning costume designer, Barbara volunteered to create costumes for Sacramento Opera for more than four decades. In addition, she helped found the Davis Theatrical Costumers Guild.

Barbara had an abiding love of the arts, particularly opera. Starting with a \$10 gift in 1968, she and Turpie gave more than \$6.5 million to U.C. Davis. Following Turpie's death in 2000, Barbara gave \$5 million to the university's campaign to build a state-of-the-art performance venue. In honor of her generosity, the main performance hall in the Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts was named the W. Turrentine and Barbara K. Jackson Hall. For many years, Barbara hosted concerts in this hall on her birthday that were offered free to the public.

Barbara was a longtime subscriber to San Francisco Opera and had a particular love of young artists. She first became a Merola member in 1986 and would often bring a busload of friends from Davis to San Francisco for performances. She went on to sponsor many Merolini, including Brian Jagde, Casey Candebat, Andrew Bidlack, Brian Michael Moore, Scott Quinn, David Lomeli, and Andrew Stenson. She traveled the world to see her former sponsorees perform and maintained lifelong friendships with them. In 2017, she sponsored Merola's 60th Anniversary Concert.

Barbara's warmth, generosity of spirit, and quiet good humor will be forever remembered by everyone at Merola—and sorely missed. 🌸

Meet and Mingle with the Merolini

JUNE 6, 2018



1 WooYoung Yoon; 2 SeokJong Baek; 3 Matthew Gemmill, Brittany Nickell, and Andrew Moore; 4 Charles Sy and Annie Brooks; 5 Jacob Scharfman with Merola Board member Robert Mison; 6 Thayer and Greer Hopkins with Meigui Zhang, Brian Michael Moore, and Matthew Gemmill; 7 Kseniia Polstiankina Barrad and James Maverick; 8 Anne Maguire and Dorothy Schimke; 9 Tracy Grant, Cheyanne Coss, Bob Ryan, and Marlen Nahhas; 10 Hiroko Prather and Kendra Berentsen; 11 Ted Allen Pickell, Patricia Westley, and James Meehan



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A Look Back at Merola Opera Program's 2018 Summer Festival

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KRISTEN LOKEN

Schwabacher Summer Concert

JULY 5 • SAN FRANCISCO CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC
JULY 7 • BING CONCERT HALL



1 Megan Grey and Brittany Nickell; 2 Marlen Nahhas and Christopher Colmenero; 3 Marlen Nahhas, Andrew Moore, and Xiaomeng Zhang; 4 Brian Michael Moore and Megan Grey; 5 Kendra Berentsen and WooYoung Yoon; 6 SeokJong Baek and Kendra Berentsen; 7 Jaeman Yoon

Mozart's *Il re pastore*

JULY 19 & 21 • SAN FRANCISCO CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC



1 Simone McIntosh and Charles Sy; 2 Patricia Westley; 3 Zhengyi Bai; 4 Simone McIntosh and Charles Sy; 5 Charles Sy, Cheyanne Coss, Patricia Westley, Zhengyi Bai, and Simone McIntosh; 6 Zhengyi Bai; 7 Cheyanne Coss

Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*

AUGUST 2 & 4 • SAN FRANCISCO CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC



1 Alexandra Urquiola; 2 Meigui Zhang; 3 Christopher Oglesby; 4 Jacob Scharfman and Christopher Oglesby; 5 Anne Maguire; 6 Addison Marlor; 7 Jacob Scharfman

Relive the Summer 2018 Season!

SEARCH "MEROLA OPERA" ON YOUTUBE



Merola Grand Finale

AUGUST 18 • WAR MEMORIAL OPERA HOUSE



1 Tutti Merolini; 2 Brian Michael Moore with Jacob Scharfman, Zhengyi Bai, Ted Allen Pickell, and Charles Sy; 3 Cheyanne Coss, Andrew Moore, Kendra Berentsen, and Simone McIntosh; 4 Meigui Zhang; 5 WooYoung Yoon; 6 Kendra Berentsen and Charles Sy

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MEROLA SPRING BENEFIT GALA

SAVE THE DATE

If I Were You A World Premiere Gala

Saturday, April 13, 2019
The Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco

Cocktail Reception & Formal Dinner
San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows Concert
DJ After-Party
Special Performance by Jake Heggie

All proceeds benefit the Merola Opera Program
Chair: Christopher Wiseman · Vice Chair: Mary Sue Bizzarri

For more information and tickets visit
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