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Contact: Jean Shirk jean@shirkmedia.com 510-332-4195

Rachel Krasner, Merola Opera Program rkrasner@merola.org 415-936-2320

To download artist pictures, visit <https://merolaoperaprogram.box.com/merola2015>

Merola Opera Program 2015 Summer Festival presents Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* August 6 and 8 at the Cowell Theater in San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO, July 1, 2015 – The Merola Opera Program presents Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*, led by conductor Warren Jones and director Nic Muni, in two performances Thursday, August 6 at 7:30pm and Saturday, August 8 at 2pm at the Cowell Theater in San Francisco.

The cast of *Don Pasquale* features Merola 2015 artists bass-baritone James Ioelu as Don Pasquale, baritone Alex DeSocio as Dr. Malatesta, tenor Soonchan Kwon as Ernesto, soprano Amina Edris as Norina, and tenor Alasdair Kent as Notary.

Old and feeble though plentifully rich, Don Pasquale feels the vigor of youth return to him when he decides to marry. Little does Pasquale know that his seemingly perfect bride "Sofronia" is actually Norina, the beloved of his nephew Ernesto. The couple concocts a whimsical plan with the clever Dr. Malatesta to set Don Pasquale in his place, and so unfolds an opera full of comedy and errors.

Director Nic Muni returns to Merola after directing the popular 2009 production of *L'amico Fritz* and the 2012 production of *La Finta Giardiniera*. He currently teaches at The Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia and Bard Conservatory of Music. As a freelance stage director, he has directed over 200 productions with companies in North America, Europe and Australia. Recent directing credits include the U.S. premiere of Wagner's *Das Liebesverbot* at Glimmerglass Opera, *Carmen* at Boston Lyric Opera, and *Postcard from Morocco* and *Of Mice and Men* at Cincinnati Conservatory of Music.

Conductor and pianist Warren Jones will work with Merola artists this season. In 2009, he conducted the Merola Opera Program's rendition of *L'amico Fritz* and has taught master classes in Merola's summer program. As performer and teacher, Jones is highly sought after by students and audiences alike on stages all over the world. He previously served as assistant conductor at the Metropolitan and San Francisco Operas, and is a faculty member at the Manhattan School of Music.

Donald Eastman is the production's scenery designer, and Ulises Alcala designed the costumes.

Tickets for performances may be purchased by calling San Francisco Opera Box Office at (415) 864-3330 or by visiting www.sfopera.com. The box office is open Monday from 10 am to 5 pm, and Tuesday through Friday from 10 am to 6 pm.

ABOUT MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM

Led artistically by San Francisco Opera Center Director and internationally acclaimed soprano Sheri Greenawald, the Merola Opera Program is an independent nonprofit organization that operates in collaboration with the San Francisco Opera. Founded in 1957 and named for San Francisco Opera's founder, Gaetano Merola, the Program is recognized as one of the most prestigious operatic training programs in the world. The Merola Opera Program typically receives more than 800 applications for approximately 29 positions. Throughout the summer, the Merola artists participate in master classes and private coaching with opera's most accomplished singers and performers.

Participants, who include singers, apprentice coaches, and an apprentice stage director, also receive training in operatic repertory, foreign languages, diction, acting, and stage movement. The Merola program artists appear in public performances throughout the summer. The Merola Opera Program Summer Festival includes two staged operas, a scenes program, and a concert.

Offered free of charge for all participants, the Merola Opera Program is unique in the industry in many ways. Merola is the only young artist program to provide financial support to developing artists for five years following participation. In the past year alone, more than \$150,000 was distributed to more than 100 artists, supporting their essential career development costs including coaching, language classes, and audition travel.

Fourteen internationally acclaimed Merola alumni—thirteen singers and one conductor—appear with the San Francisco Opera in 2015: René Barbera (2008), Catherine Cook (1990), Leah Crocetto (2008), Mark Delavan (1985), AJ Glueckert (2012), Susan Graham (1987), Thomas Hampson (1980), Philip Horst (1999), Bryan Hymel (2001), Daveda Karanas (2007), Daniela Mack (2007), Nadine Sierra (2010), Alek Shrader (2007), Philippe Sly (2011), and Patrick Summers (1986, 1987). In addition, only Merola graduates are considered for participation in the San Francisco Opera's Adler Fellowship program.

For more information about the Merola Opera Program, please visit www.merola.org or call (415) 936-2324. For more information on the individual Merola Opera Program artists for 2015, please visit www.merola.org/merolaartists. To download press photos of the 2015 Merola artists, please visit <https://merolaoperaprogram.box.com/merola2015> (no password required; for media use only).

CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

2015 Merola Opera Summer Festival

Tickets for all performances may be purchased by calling San Francisco Opera Box Office at (415) 864-3330 or by visiting www.sfopera.com. The box office is open Monday from 10 am to 5 pm and Tuesday through Friday from 10 am to 6 pm.

Thursday, August 6 at 7:30 pm and Saturday, August 8 at 2 pm

Cowell Theater, Fort Mason Center, San Francisco

Merola Opera Program: ***Don Pasquale*** by Gaetano Donizetti

(sung in Italian with English supertitles)

Warren Jones - conductor
Nic Muni - director
Don Pasquale - James Ioelu
Dr. Malatesta - Alex DeSocio
Ernesto - Soonchan Kwon
Norina - Amina Edris
Notary - Alasdair Kent
Ulises Alcala - costume design
Donald Eastman - scenery design

True love wins when the old skinflint Pasquale tries to force his nephew to marry for money - and gets a lesson he'll never forget.

TICKETS: \$65/\$45/\$15 for students with ID. Tickets may be purchased by calling the San Francisco Opera Box Office at (415) 864-3330 or by visiting www.sfopera.com. The box office is open Monday from 10 am to 5 pm and Tuesday through Friday from 10 am to 6 pm.

Saturday, August 22 at 7:30 pm

War Memorial Opera House, 301 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco

Merola Opera Program: **Merola Grand Finale**

Conductor - Antony Walker
Director - Mo Zhou
Featuring the 2015 Merola Opera Program artists

Program and casting to be announced. Post-performance reception (10 pm) with the artists, Opera House Lower Level Café.

TICKETS: \$45 Grand Tier and Orchestra Premium/\$35 Orchestra and Grand Tier/\$25 Dress Circle/\$15 Students with ID. Tickets may be purchased by calling the San Francisco Opera Box Office at (415) 864-3330. The box office is open Monday, 10 am to 5 pm, and Tuesday through Friday, 10 am to 6 pm. Post-performance reception tickets: \$50. For reception tickets, please call the San Francisco Opera Box Office at (415) 864-3330.

MEDIA INQUIRIES

For media inquiries, please contact Jean Shirk at jean@shirkmedia.com or (510) 332-4195, or Rachel Krasner, Merola Opera Program Marketing and Events Associate, at rkrasner@merola.org or (415) 936-2320.