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Twenty-nine singers and artists from seven countries to participate in 12-week intensive Merola Opera Program in San Francisco June 8-August 22

Summer performances begin July 9 and include Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* and Menotti's *The Medium* as a double bill, Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*, the Schwabacher Summer Concert, the Merola Grand Finale, and a free concert in Yerba Buena Gardens; performances at the War Memorial Opera House, Cowell Theater at Fort Mason, and San Francisco Conservatory of Music

Conductors Valéry Ryvkin, Mark Morash, Warren Jones, and Antony Walker lead performances

SAN FRANCISCO, UPDATED June 4, 2015 – Twenty-three singers, five apprentice coaches, and one apprentice stage director, representing seven countries, will participate in the 58th season of the [Merola Opera Program](#) from June 8 to August 22, San Francisco Opera Center Director Sheri Greenawald announced today. More than 800 artists vied this year for the 29 coveted spots in the highly selective summer opera training program. Nearly one third of this season's artists come from countries outside the United States, including artists from Australia, China, Italy, New Zealand, Russia and South Korea, and the US artists hail from 15 states, including California, New York, Illinois, Michigan, Florida, Texas, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Idaho.

Opera luminaries Jane Eaglen, Martin Katz, Malcolm Martineau, James Morris, and Antony Walker will offer public master classes for the 2015 Merola artists as part of their intensive 11-week training program beginning June 8. Guest teachers Richard Battle, Steven Blier, Deborah Birnbaum, Alan Darling, Peter Grunberg, Robin Guarino, Bruce Lamott, Kevin Murphy, Ann Murray, John Parr, and Cesar Ulloa provide training in voice, foreign languages, operatic repertory, diction, acting and stage movement. Apprentice coaches and the apprentice stage director have a 12-week program.

The 2015 training program culminates in the Merola Opera Program Summer Festival, beginning Thursday, July 9 with the artists performing in the Schwabacher Summer Concert, directed by Roy Rallo and conducted by Valéry Ryvkin, at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and a free outdoor afternoon concert at Yerba Buena Gardens in San Francisco on Saturday, July 11. The program will feature extended, semi-staged scenes from the operatic repertoire, including Verdi's *La Traviata* and

Don Carlo, Floyd's *Susannah*, and Wagner's *Die Walküre*. The Merola artists perform two one-hour operas on a double bill, Menotti's *The Medium*, about a séance gone awry, and Puccini's comic opera *Gianni Schicchi*, on Thursday, July 23 and Saturday, July 25 in the newly-renovated and intimate Cowell Theater at Fort Mason. Mark Morash conducts and Peter Kazaras directs.

Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*, led by director Nic Muni and conducted by pianist and conductor Warren Jones, will be presented on Thursday, August 6 and Saturday, August 8 at the Cowell Theater. The festival concludes with the participants singing in the annual Merola Grand Finale, an operatic showcase with full orchestra, led by conductor Antony Walker and directed by Merola Opera Program apprentice stage director Mo Zhou on Saturday, August 22 at the War Memorial Opera House.

Tickets for all performances may be purchased by calling San Francisco Opera Box Office at (415) 864-3330 or by visiting www.sfoopera.com. The box office is open Monday, 10 am to 5 pm and Tuesday through Friday, 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—will 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. In 2015, the Merola Opera Program will have four returning Merola artists, Alex DeSocio (2013), Edoardo Barsotti, Kirill Kuzmin, and Scott Russell (all 2014).

A full season calendar follows the artist announcement below. For more information about the Merola Opera Program, please visit www.merola.org or call (415) 551-6299. 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).

ARTIST LISTING:

Sopranos

Kathryn Bowden, Glastonbury, Connecticut
Cree Carrico, Detroit, Michigan
Amina Edris, Christchurch, New Zealand
Madison Leonard, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
Meredith Mecum, Hershey, Pennsylvania
Toni Marie Palmertree, Fleetwood, Pennsylvania

Mezzo-sopranos

Raehann Bryce-Davis, Keene, Texas
Tara Curtis, Kansas City, Missouri
Ashley Dixon, Peachtree City, Georgia
Nicole Woodward, Quincy, Florida

Tenors

Christopher Bozeka, Akron, Ohio
Alasdair Kent, Perth, Australia
Soonchan Kwon, Daejeon, South Korea
Michael Papincak, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Baritones

Alex DeSocio, Wichita, Kansas
Sol Jin, Seoul, South Korea
Kihun Yoon, Seoul, South Korea

Bass-baritones

Zachary Elmassian, East Lansing, Michigan
James Ioelu, Auckland, New Zealand
Austin Siebert, Shelbyville, Indiana
Brad Walker, Lake Zurich, Illinois

Basses

Scott Russell, Roanoke, Virginia
Ming Zhao, Kaifeng, China

Apprentice Coaches

Edoardo Barsotti, Lucca, Tuscany, Italy
Robert Bosworth, Fort Worth, Texas
Aaron Breid, Del Mar, California
Samuel Emanuel, New Rochelle, New York
Kirill Kuzmin, Moscow, Russia

Apprentice Stage Director

Mo Zhou, Nanjing, China

CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

2015 Merola Opera Summer Festival

Calendar of Performances

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, 10 am to 5 pm and Tuesday through Friday, 10 am to 6 pm.

Thursday, July 9 at 7:30 pm

San Francisco Conservatory of Music, 50 Oak St., San Francisco
Merola Opera Program: **Schwabacher Summer Concert**

Valéry Ryvkin – conductor
Roy Rallo – director
Meredith Mecum and Toni Marie Palmertree – sopranos
Raehann Bryce-Davis – mezzo-soprano
Michael Papincak – tenor
Sol Jin - baritone
Scott Russell and Ming Zhao – basses

Program:

Floyd - *Susannah*, Act 2, scene 3
Susannah – Meredith Mecum
Olin Blitch – Scott Russell

Verdi - *La Traviata*, Act 2
Alfredo – Michael Papincak
Annina – Raehann Bryce-Davis
Violetta – Toni Marie Palmertree
Giuseppe – Scott Russell
Germont – Sol Jin

Wagner - *Die Walküre*, Act 2, scene 4
Brünnhilde – Meredith Mecum
Siegmund – Michael Papincak

Verdi - *Don Carlo*, Act 4, parte prima
Filippo – Ming Zhao
Il Grande Inquisitore – Scott Russell
Elisabetta – Toni Marie Palmertree
Eboli – Raehann Bryce-Davis
Rodrigo – Sol Jin

TICKETS: \$40/\$25/\$15 for 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.

Saturday, July 11 at 2 pm

Yerba Buena Gardens, 773 Mission St. between 3rd and 4th Streets, San Francisco
Merola Opera Program: **Schwabacher Summer Concert**
FREE outdoor concert

Valéry Ryvkin – conductor
Roy Rallo – director
Meredith Mecum and Toni Marie Palmertree – sopranos
Raehann Bryce-Davis – mezzo-soprano
Michael Papincak – tenor
Sol Jin - baritone
Scott Russell and Ming Zhao – basses

Program:

Floyd - *Susannah*, Act 2, scene 3
Susannah – Meredith Mecum
Olin Blitch – Scott Russell

Verdi - *La Traviata*, Act 2
Alfredo – Michael Papincak
Annina – Raehann Bryce-Davis
Violetta – Toni Marie Palmertree
Giuseppe – Scott Russell
Germont – Sol Jin

Wagner - *Die Walküre*, Act 2, scene 4
Brünnhilde – Meredith Mecum
Siegfried – Michael Papincak

Verdi - *Don Carlo*, Act 4, parte prima
Filippo – Ming Zhao
Il Grande Inquisitore – Scott Russell
Elisabetta – Toni Marie Palmertree
Eboli – Raehann Bryce-Davis
Rodrigo – Sol Jin

TICKETS: This is a free outdoor concert; no tickets required.

Thursday, July 23 at 7:30 pm and Saturday, July 25 at 2 pm

Cowell Theater, Fort Mason Center, San Francisco

Merola Opera Program: ***The Medium* (by Gian Carlo Menotti) and *Gianni Schicchi* (by Giacomo Puccini)**

Mark Morash - conductor

Peter Kazaras - director

The Medium (Gian Carlo Menotti)

Monica - Madison Leonard
Toby - Alasdair Kent
Madame Flora (Baba) - Nicole Woodward
Mrs. Gobineau - Kathryn Bowden
Mr. Gobineau - Austin Siebert
Mrs. Nolan - Ashley Dixon

Gianni Schicchi (Giacomo Puccini)

Gianni Schicchi - Kihun Yoon
Lauretta - Cree Carrico
Zita - Tara Curtis
Rinuccio - Christopher Bozeka
Gherardo - Alasdair Kent
Nella - Kathryn Bowden
Betto - Brad Walker
Simone - Zachary Elmassian
Marco - Austin Siebert
Ciesca - Ashley Dixon
Spinelloccio - Sol Jin
Amantio di Nicolao - Scott Russell
Pinellino - Ming Zhao
Guccio - Sol Jin

Double bill: Two one-hour operas, sung in English and Italian, respectively, with English supertitles. In *The Medium*, a séance goes terribly awry when a pseudo-seer and a mute boy get involved. The one-act comic opera *Gianni Schicchi* explores the grimly humorous and divisive greed that emerges on the death of a relative.

TICKETS: \$65/\$45/\$15 for 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.

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

Norina - Amina Edris, soprano

Pasquale – James Ioelu, bass-baritone

Ernesto – Soonchan Kwon, tenor

Malatesta – Alex DeSocio, baritone

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. The box office is open Monday, 10 am to 5 pm and Tuesday through Friday, 10 am to 6 pm.

Saturday, August 22 at 7:30 pm

War Memorial Opera House, 300 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco

Merola Opera Program: **Merola Grand Finale and Reception**

Conductor – Antony Walker

Director – Mo Zhou

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@sfopera.com or (415) 551-6299.