



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM ANNOUNCES *GIRLS OF THE GOLDEN WEST*
ANNUAL BENEFIT AND SILENT AUCTION HONORING FOUR LONG-TIME
MEROLA SUPPORTERS
TO BE HELD APRIL 13 AT THE FAIRMONT SAN FRANCISCO**

SAN FRANCISCO, February 25, 2013 — The Merola Opera Program’s 2013 Spring Benefit will be held from 6 p.m. to 12 a.m. Saturday, April 13 at The Fairmont San Francisco. *Girls of the Golden West* honors four of Merola’s long-time supporters: the late Mrs. Lonny J. Darwin, Mrs. A. Barlow Ferguson, Barbara K. Jackson and Miss Vivienne E. Miller. The event will feature a silent auction with an emphasis on fine wines and once-in-a-lifetime experiences; cocktails and hors d’oeuvres; a formal three-course dinner; a concert featuring the 2013 San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows and after-dinner dancing and drinks. Proceeds from the evening will support the Merola Opera Program, one of the most respected young artist training programs in the world. A recognized leader in the opera community, Merola provides invaluable training and financial support to the next generation of opera talent.



The silent auction will have a special emphasis on wines again this year, in addition to featuring entertainment, dining and travel items. “We are incredibly fortunate that Merola’s wine auction continues to be a draw for wine lovers who will once again have a chance to bid on a wide variety of wines, including many rare and valuable vintages,” said Auction Co-Chair Dr. James Cross who worked with his Co-Chair Jane Burkhard to put together the remarkable auction. An extensive wine section will feature more than 50 bottles of fine wines and experts will be on hand to answer questions and assist guests in choosing the perfect bottle to bid on. Wine enthusiasts will also be tempted by a limited-entry raffle for two desirable bottles of Chateau



Lafite-Rothchild from vintages nearly 30 years apart, 1962 and 1990 collectively valued at over \$2,000.

Merola's annual Spring Benefit is well-known for its unique "Signature Events" arranged by Board Members Tracy Grant, Patrick Wilken and Rusty Rolland. Highlights include recitals with renowned artists and Merola Alumni William Burden, Lucas Meachem, Alek Shrader and Daniela Mack as well as conversations with Dolora Zajick and Neil Shicoff.

"The real highlight of this year's event is the chance to honor these four remarkable women," said Spring Benefit Chair Robert Mison. "These women truly are Merola's 'Golden Girls' and have provided consistent support and enthusiasm for years. We think that Merola supporters will jump at the chance to celebrate their lives and work at this year's Spring Benefit."

Mrs. Lonny J. Darwin, Mrs. A. Barlow Ferguson, Barbara K. Jackson and Miss Vivienne E. Miller each have given to the Merola Opera Program and the Merolini in their own way for most of Merola's more than 50 years. Merola is proud to honor these "Golden Girls" at this year's Spring Benefit.

The late Mrs. Lonny J. Darwin joined the Merola Board of Directors in 1993 and became an Emeritus Board member in 2009. A Merola sponsor year after year, Lonny charmed Merolini with her kindness, intelligence and elegance. Lonny was also on the Board of Directors of the America-Israel Cultural Foundation and the Holocaust Center of Northern California.

Mrs. A Barlow Ferguson became a member of the Merola Board of Directors shortly after the organization's founding. For more than 30 years she served as an enthusiastic Merola Board member from 1960 to 1990 and is currently an Emeritus Board member. She has sponsored a Merolini since 1978. She is also a generous supporter of numerous arts and education organizations including being a Life Governor of the San Francisco Symphony and a trustee of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

Barbara Jackson is known for introducing the Davis community to Merola by arranging bus rides to bring her Davis neighbors to Merola performances. Barbara has sponsored a Merola tenor every summer for almost 20 years. She travels far and wide to hear "her tenors" perform. Barbara also is well known as an award-winning costume designer for the Davis Comic Opera Company, Davis Players, Davis High School and Sacramento Opera Company. In 2009, Barbara received the Spirit of Opera Award, San Francisco Opera's highest honor.

For many years, Miss Vivienne E. Miller has been a generous and active Merola and Amici di Merola member. For more than 15 summers, Vivienne has sponsored a Merola singer. She attended her first opera backstage at the Metropolitan Opera in New York when she was three years old and she has loved opera ever since. Vivienne is also a Parliamentarian of the Friends of the Mill Valley Library Board of Directors. Her smiles and hugs at Merola events are appreciated by all.

Each of these "Golden Girls" is a member of the Merola Legacy Society. The Merola Legacy Society honors those who have included the Merola Opera Program in their will, trust or other

estate plans. Legacy gifts provide the financial resources that create extraordinary opportunities to ensure and enhance the future of the Merola Opera Program.

The Merola Opera Program is dedicated to the continuing education and training of the finest young operatic talent and to the development of this talent into professional opera singers, coaches and stage directors of the highest artistic caliber. Merola operates in close artistic collaboration with San Francisco Opera, but is an independent nonprofit organization. Governed by a separate board of directors, Merola is responsible for its own long-term financial stability and fundraising and is grateful to the hundreds of loyal members, donors and foundations who support the Program.

CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

Merola Opera Program Presents *Girls of the Golden West* Annual Benefit Gala & Silent Auction

Join the Merola Opera Program for its annual Spring Benefit. This year Merola honors four of its long-time supporters: the late Mrs. Lonny J. Darwin, Mrs. A. Barlow Ferguson, Barbara K. Jackson and Miss Vivienne E. Miller. The event will feature a silent auction with an emphasis on fine wines and once-in-a-lifetime experiences; cocktails and hors d'oeuvres; a formal three-course dinner; a concert featuring the 2013 San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows and after-dinner dancing and drinks.

6 p.m. to 12 a.m. Saturday, April 13
The Fairmont San Francisco, 950 Mason Street, San Francisco, California 94108
Tickets: \$300, \$600, \$1,200 and \$2,500; proceeds benefit Merola Opera Program

TICKETS:

Tickets for the *Girls of the Golden West* are \$300, \$600, \$1,200 and \$2,500. All tickets are available through the Merola Opera Program and can be purchased by emailing aelliott@sfoera.com, calling (415) 551-6299 or online at www.brownpapertickets.com/event/288007.

Merola is accepting donations in honor of the four “Golden Girls.” To make a donation, please contact Miriam Rosenfeld at mrosenfeld@sfoera.com or call (415) 565-3235.

For more information about Merola, please visit www.merola.org or call (415) 551-6299.

PHOTO CREDIT:

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Led artistically by San Francisco Opera Center Director and internationally acclaimed soprano Sheri Greenawald, the Merola Opera Program is an independent nonprofit organization which 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 30 positions. Throughout the summer, Merola artists participate in master classes and private coachings with opera luminaries. Participants – who include singers, apprentice coaches and an apprentice stage director – also receive training in operatic repertory, foreign languages, diction, acting and stage movement.