

A Truly Golden 50th Anniversary

2007 has been a milestone year for Merola. It afforded us the opportunity to look back on our first five decades training the future of opera—and at the same time, look to the bright prospects for this vital program.

Much of Merola's success stems from our devoted members. This year many of our members went "above and beyond" to show their support for the organization by joining our Golden Anniversary Club. Almost 600 members were asked to consider a gift increase of 50 percent or more over the amount they gave Merola in 2006. More than 25 percent of our dedicated members rejoined at the new level. The first \$50,000 of these increased gifts was matched by funds pledged by a small group of Board members. In addition to our many individual supporters, The Bernard Osher Foundation made a special grant to support a variety of anniversary efforts. This extraordinary generosity from numerous sources helped Merola realize our most successful year ever, raising important funds that will support the organization and the young artists we serve for years to come.

The May 19th Gala was a tribute to the anniversary. It was held at The Regency Center and featured a silent auction, a formal dinner, and a full concert starring Merola alumni including Joyce DiDonato, Daniel Sumegi, Nicole

Folland and Patrick Summers, among many others. One of the highlights of the concert was a world-premiere song written by Jake Heggie in honor of James Schwabacher and performed by Joyce DiDonato. The evening was a spectacular night of glamour and music.

In celebration of the anniversary, Merola produced a CD featuring notable alumni artists such as Carol Vaness, Thomas Hampson and Anna Netrebko. Through an agreement with Universal Classics Group, Merola was able to offer the recording to members as a benefit of joining the Golden Anniversary Club or attending the Gala.

Merola also produced a special limited-edition book, *Voices Heard Round the World—The Merola Opera Program at Fifty Years*, written by local author and Merola Board member Tracy Grant. The book is a journey through time, tracing the history of Merola through anecdotes and photos. Look for additional opportunities to receive a complimentary CD and/or book in your fall renewal letter, which you should receive in the coming weeks. Or, use the form on page 2 to order a copy of the book today.

Another highlight of the year was Merola's production of a world-premiere opera, *The Hotel Casablanca* by Thomas Pasatieri. This new work was the first world premiere to be part of a Merola summer and gave the

Merolini the chance to meet and work with the composer.

The Program received tremendous accolades during the year including a feature story in the July issue of *Opera News*, a cover story in the San Francisco Chronicle Pink Pages and numerous mentions in other publications.

Merola's anniversary celebrations have now come to an end, but in November, Merola will be honored by the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society for 50 years of contributions to the world of music. The event is called "Standing Ovation—A Celebration of the Performing Arts," and Merola will be joined by other organizations celebrating important anniversaries in 2007. For information about attending this event go to sfhistory.org

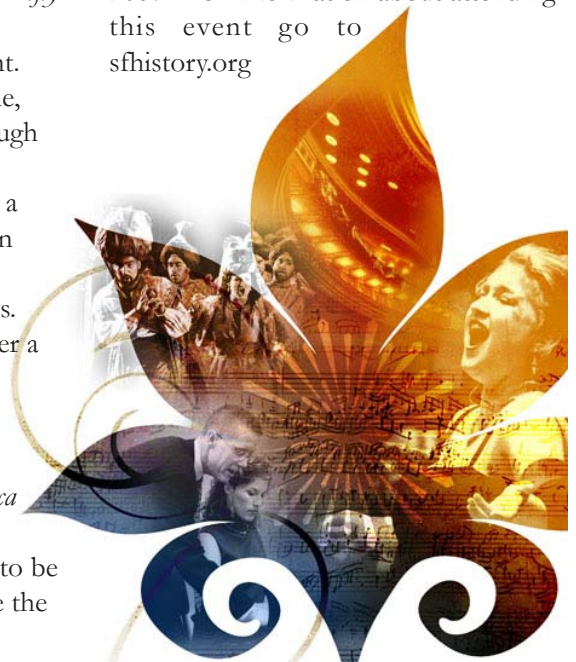


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Engaging Younger Members

Building Audiences of the Future

It has long been recognized in the arts world that our audiences and members are aging. This is especially true in the opera segment of the industry, as shown in a study that tracked audience ages over a ten-year period. The research showed that of those who attend opera, the oldest age groups were overrepresented compared to other arts audiences, and the youngest ages were vastly underrepresented.¹ As our older audiences leave us, who will take their place?

Schwabacher, who had a lifelong dedication to young artists, the program had Merola partner with local universities to offer 50 students (in our 50th year) a free summer membership. It started by asking the heads of music departments at U.C. Berkeley, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, San Francisco State, Sonoma State and Stanford University to submit the names of students they felt would

appreciate being a Merola member and getting an inside look into the Program.

We started with music students feeling that they were the most likely to already have an enthusiastic appreciation of opera. The 50 students who were chosen attended an orientation last April where Sheri Greenawald, members of the Board of Directors and Nikki Einfeld, former Merolina, shared information about the Program with them. They were offered free tickets to a variety of events including Day at Merola, Meet the Merolini, both operas' dress rehearsals



Photo by John Lee

A young girl listening to the concert at Yerba Buena Gardens.

NEA - 2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts

- Three percent of adults go to opera at least once per year, a rate that has been constant since 1992.
- About 58 percent of the audience for live opera is female.
- More than 10 percent of adults with a graduate education went to the opera at least once in 2002.
- People 45 to 74 are the most likely to attend opera.

Since Merola is a program that trains young artists, we feel we should make a particular effort to engage younger audiences as well. Recently, we've developed two strategies to help us reach that goal.

2007 was the inception of a program called "The Schwabacher 50" (S-50). This was the brainchild of the Membership Committee chair, Anna Pope. Named for our late chairman, James

and the Merola Grand Finale and reception. Merola's goal was to introduce these students to the Program, with the hope that a handful of them will choose to make a donation and become members in future years.

To help them make the transition from S-50 to full members, in 2008 Merola will have a special student membership category, open to all students with a valid school ID card. Details are still being finalized, but we hope that this will entice younger individuals to join Merola and become the next generation of opera fans.

If you know a student who would be interested, be sure to share this information with them when you get your fall membership letter.

¹ Age and Arts Participation, with a Focus on the Baby Boom Cohort, Richard A. Peterson and Darren E. Sherkat Judith Huggins Balfe and Rolf Meyersohn Research Division Report #34, National Endowments for the Arts

Celebrate Merola's First Fifty Years

This special, limited-edition book by local author and Merola board member Tracy Grant looks back on the Merola Opera Program's founding, and traces the journey that has brought the Program to where it stands today. Filled with anecdotes from alumni and historic photographs, *Voices Heard Round the World* will be a treasured keepsake for years to come.



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In Memoriam

James H. Schwabacher, Jr.

Affectionately known to his Merola family as “Sir James of Merola,” Jim was not only instrumental in the establishment and development of the Merola Opera Program—he became its very heart and soul, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to the next generation of vocal talent. His guiding hand, tireless work, high standards and commitment to young talent made ours the preeminent opera training program in the world.

Jim was, first and foremost, a musician. And just as important to him as making music was encouraging others to do the same. He took pride in passing on insights gleaned from his own career and studies, and he conveyed rigorous musical standards with a gentle and loving touch. A generous mentor, he shared with scores of Merola artists not only his extraordinary collection of recorded music, but also priceless encouragement and advice.

In addition to his artistic leadership, Schwabacher provided vital financial and administrative stewardship to Merola, serving as President of the Board of Directors for twenty-nine years and subsequently as Chairman of the Board for fifteen years. For the Program’s first half-century, he kept it focused on its mission to identify, train and nurture the finest young operatic talent.

James Schwabacher’s impact on the Merola Opera Program and the hundreds of artists it has shaped is immeasurable. We will never forget our dear friend.



Sandra McCabe

Sandra McCabe was a friend of Merola and a friend of music. She spent 27 years as a middle and high school music teacher. She also played the flute and sang in Masterworks Chorale for 26 years. Sandy was a strong supporter of the Merola Opera Program and an active member of the Amici di Merola. She was truly an ambassador for the Program, introducing new people to Merola who are now members. She loved the young artists and will be missed by all.

Jayne Heagy

James and Janey Heagy joined the Merola Opera Program in 1995. Jim says Janey loved Merola because she got to know the next generation of opera talent. Their support of the Program grew over the years until they were sponsors of artists and classes and would donate for extras like artist attire, making sure the artists looked their best for the Merola Grand Finale. Even when Janey became too ill to attend events, Jim was there representing both of them, always talking about his “Sweetie”. Merola is saddened by the loss of this good friend.

Alumni Awards

This is only a partial sampling of recent awards won by our Merolini. You can submit news anytime by emailing it to mop@sfopera.com.

Karen Slack won first prize at the Jose Iturbi Foundation Competition in LA and **Jamie Chamberlin** came in third.

Heidi Melton won a Shenson Performing Arts Fellowship.

Vince Yi and **Daniela Mack** both received a Richard F. Gold grant from the Shoshana Foundation in 2007. Other alumni receiving it in past years include Ailyn Perez, Grant Youngblood, Jeremy Little, Ryan MacPherson and Alison Tupay.

Three of the recent winners at Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions for the Upper Midwest were alumni: **Joshua Kohl**, **Jamie-Rose Guarrine** and **Hein Jung**

In 2007, **Meredith Arwady** was awarded a Richard Tucker Career Grant, and **Alek Schrader** received a Sara Tucker Study Grant.

2007 Summer Memories

La Cenerentola

July 13 & 15

This production is sure to become a highlight of the Program and will be mentioned in years to come as “that wonderful *Cenerentola*.” It received some of the most glowing critical reviews of a Merola production in recent history and the cast of artists was praised mightily.

...worthy of any operatic stage in the country.

—Suzanne Weiss, CultureVulture.net

There was more than enough talent on display at Friday's opening to give this “Cenerentola” — Rossini's version of the fairy tale “Cinderella,” in which a lowly housemaid finds true love with a handsome prince — its requisite sparkle.

—Georgia Rowe, Contra Costa Times

Again and again, I found myself both dazzled by the music and touched by the emotions. The work's formality was balanced with its feelings thanks to the superb singing of a hero and heroine the same age as the characters they portray.

—John Bender, San Francisco Classical Voice



Photo by Kristen Loken

Stepsisters Daveda Karanas and Ani Maldjian sandwiching Paul La Rosa as Dandini.



Photo by Kristen Loken

Daniela Mack as the radiant Cenerentola.

Ashley Logan as Cleopatra singing to her Cesare, Vince Yi



Photo by John Lee

Schwabacher Summer Concert

At Yerba Buena Gardens, July 29

On a sunny Sunday in San Francisco, thousands gathered to hear a concert of opera scenes performed at Yerba Buena Gardens. The young artists worked with director Roy Rallo to create scenes from *Così fan tutte*, *Aida*, *L'Elisir D'Amore*, *Hansel and Gretel* and *Giulio Cesare*.

The beautiful music coming from the stage has the power to stop tourists in their tracks. Whether they join opera fans on the lawn or just observe for a few minutes and continue on their way, the young artists of Merola make an impact on their time in the city.

The orchestra was conducted by Merola alumnus Mark Morash, and as always, performed beautifully in the challenging and perpetually windy venue.



Photo by John Lee

Cynthia Hanna as Hansel.



Tamara Wapinsky and Paula Murrhy hide from Kenneth Kellogg, the ranch manager Tobias.

The Hotel Casablanca

World Premiere, August 3 & 5

The first world premiere performed by Merola artists was a fun, lively romp through ranchland Texas. This ensemble piece was not only a showcase of the artists' vocal prowess but also of their acting talents.

"Everything is bigger in Texas," goes a lyric in The Hotel Casablanca. Taking that maxim and galloping with it, composer Thomas Pasatieri let his musical and comic imagination roam free in his latest opera.

—Steve Winn, San Francisco Chronicle

The Hotel Casablanca featured a cast of promising young singers who handled Pasatieri's lush lyricism with aplomb.

—Paul Duklos, Music Web International



Andrew Bidlack as Charles listens to his uncle Tom Carter, played by Tom Corbeil.

Merola Grand Finale

August 18

The Merola Grand Finale is the apex of the summer program. In 2007, alumnus Patrick Summers was scheduled to conduct, however an accident resulting in knee surgery forced him to cancel the engagement. Luckily for Merola

audiences and artists, Stephen Lord was able to take up the baton and conduct an evening of wonderful arias and ensemble pieces. Merola apprentice stage director Eugenia Arsenis staged the concert with innovative flair and dramatic verve.

Another boatload of startlingly gifted artists streamed through the program this summer, and if Saturday's Grand Finale program in the War Memorial Opera House is any guide, tomorrow's opera stages won't be lacking for talent.

—Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle

It was certainly a group that SFO founder Gaetano Merola would have loved: shy tenors, a saucy soubrette, a villainous bass, big voices and small voices and some just right....

—James Keolker, San Francisco Classical Voice



Photo by Kristen Loken

Paula Murrhy at the Merola Grand Finale.



Photo by Kristen Loken

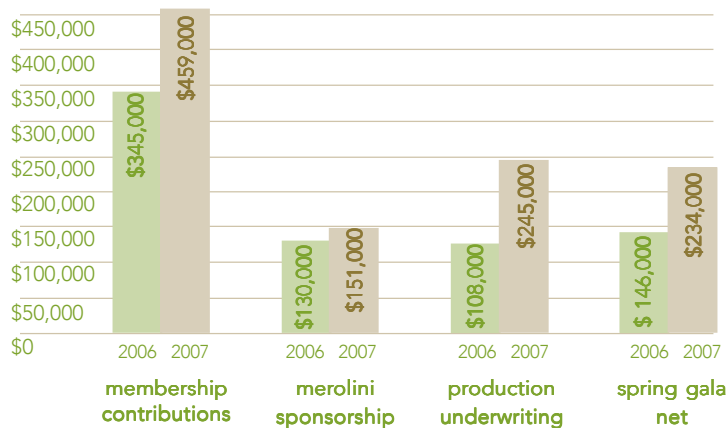
Jamie-Rose Guarrine and Vince Yi at the Merola Grand Finale.

Merola's Financial Health

Preliminary reports show that while we kept expenses within 1 percent of what was budgeted, we increased revenue by almost 30 percent over budget. This data will be official late in 2007 when the audited figures are released.

Most of the growth can be attributed to increased membership gifts, support for the Gala and other underwriting for the 50th Anniversary. We ended the year with almost 800 members, 100 of whom were new this year.

Although in 2008 we will no longer be celebrating such an exciting anniversary, we will strive to keep the levels of support high, which will allow Merola to grow and expand as we head into the next 50 years.



Merola Opera Program Donor Listings

We extend our sincere appreciation to all donors and acknowledge the following individuals, foundations, and corporations for their generous combined gifts made between **October 1, 2006 and September 15, 2007**, in support of the Merola Opera Program.

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New Member Profile



Dale Robards and Robert Kavanaugh

As the past President of Berkeley Opera, Dale is no stranger to arts organizations or the world of opera. When Merola Board member Sue Hone brought her to Day at Merola in 2006, Dale knew she wanted to get herself and her husband Bob involved. She started as a volunteer on the Gala Committee last fall, gathering auction

items for the 50th Anniversary event. Dale and Bob attended Gala and decided to make a sizable donation to sponsor a Merolini this summer. They were assigned Daveda Karanas and jumped into the Merola experience fully, attending most of the classes and productions over the summer. Dale tells us more about their experience in the following interview:

When volunteering for the Gala, what made you decide Merola was an organization you wanted to support financially?

I spent years as an event planner, so involvement in a large, social event was a natural way to start meeting people involved in Merola. It quickly became clear that the Gala Committee was organized and dedicated, which was very appealing to me. I also noticed that guests we met at the Gala were so enthusiastic about Merola.

What made you choose to sponsor a Merolini in your first year?

Bob and I really believe this program is crucial to the future of opera. We knew this level of giving would simultaneously benefit a singer and provide us with an opportunity to learn more about opera through the master classes and interaction with the Merolini and other members.

“We had high hopes for this sponsorship experience, which Merola and the 2007 Merolini have far exceeded.”

How have you enjoyed your position as a sponsor over the summer?

It’s been fantastic! I had wanted this sponsorship to become personal, and it has. Daveda and I have an active email relationship, and we’ve even managed lunch and dinner a couple of

times. Bob says we’ve become “Daveda-heads” who will travel the world to hear her sing.