



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM 2014 SPRING BENEFIT GALA
HONORS LOTFI MANSOURI**

A NIGHT IN NEW ORLEANS
APRIL 12 AT THE FAIRMONT SAN FRANCISCO

SAN FRANCISCO, February 25, 2014 —

Merola Opera Program honors the late Lotfi Mansouri at the annual 2014 Spring Benefit Gala Saturday, April 12, at The Fairmont San Francisco. Former San Francisco Opera General Director Lotfi Mansouri was a long-time Merola supporter and *A Night in New Orleans* pays homage to his artistic legacy both in San Francisco and throughout the

world. The Gala features a silent auction with an emphasis on fine wines and Merola's signature once-in-a-lifetime experiences. Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres begin the evening at 6 p.m. followed by a formal three-course dinner and a concert featuring the 2014 San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows. After-dinner drinks and dancing conclude the festivities until 12 a.m. Proceeds from the evening will support the Merola Opera Program, acclaimed as one of the top young artist training programs in the world.



In addition to a beautiful offering of fine wines, travel opportunities and other exciting events, highlights of the Merola Silent Auction include its "Signature Events." These unique events offer patrons a chance to participate and interact with the world's leading opera artists in private concerts and conversations in the intimate setting of a private home. "Merola's Signature Events are really very special and always hot, sell-out items at our Gala," said auction chair Carlyn Clause. Leading the effort this year is board member Patrick Wilken who has curated an exciting array of recitals with renowned artists such as Merola alumni Leah Crocetto, Nadine Sierra, Daniela Mack, René Barbera and Alek Shrader, as well as exclusive conversations with Carol Vaness, Quinn Kelsey, Eric Owens and John DeMain. In addition, the auction will once again feature an extensive selection of more than 65 bottles of fine wines with experts on hand to answer questions and assist guests in choosing the perfect bottles for their bids. Wine enthusiasts will also be tempted

by a raffle for a bottle of 1999 Domaine de la Romanee-Conti Romanee-Saint-Vivant (Marey Monge) valued at \$1,500.



“The real highlight of this year’s event is the chance to honor the late Lotfi Mansouri,” said Spring Benefit co-chairs David Hogle and Dr. W. Conrad Sweeting. “During his tenure as General Director of San Francisco Opera, Mr. Mansouri was keenly aware of Merola’s important contribution to the future of opera. Not only did Lotfi give generously of his time, offering advice and wisdom to the young singers of Merola, but he

also supported the artists through performance opportunities on the San Francisco Opera stage and throughout the world during his directing career. Merola is proud to honor the memory of Lotfi Mansouri and promote his lasting legacy by establishing an endowment in his name designed specifically to train aspiring stage directors.”

Lotfi Mansouri’s deepest wish was that opera become accessible to everyone. During his 13 years as the general director at San Francisco Opera, he channeled this desire by striving for directness and honesty in his productions. This ideal became the principle of his service. After the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, he oversaw the reconstruction of the War Memorial Opera House and helped to creatively rework the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium in order to continue performances. Mr. Mansouri received the 2001 San Francisco Opera medal and an Opera Honors Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Endowment for the Arts. A bas-relief plaque of Mr. Mansouri in the foyer of the War Memorial Opera House reads, “Opera is the greatest artistic banquet created by the human mind, with something for every taste.”

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

***A Night in New Orleans* Annual Spring Benefit Gala and Silent Auction**

Join the Merola Opera Program for its annual Spring Benefit Gala. This year Merola honors a long-time supporter, the late Lotfi Mansouri. 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 2014 San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows and after-dinner dancing and drinks.

6 p.m. to 12 a.m. Saturday, April 12

The Fairmont San Francisco, 950 Mason Street, San Francisco, California 94108

TICKETS

Tickets for *A Night in New Orleans* are \$325, \$650, \$1,200 and \$2,500. All tickets are available through the Merola Opera Program and can be purchased by emailing ksepich@sfopera.com, by calling (415) 551-6299 or online at www.brownpapertickets.com/event/491746.

Merola is accepting donations for the Merola Lotfi Mansouri Stage Director Fund. This fund will assist in providing training for aspiring opera stage directors. To make a donation, please contact Miriam Rosenfeld at mrosenfeld@sfopera.com or call (415) 565-3235.

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

PHOTO CREDIT

Inside The Fairmont San Francisco / Drew Altizer Photography

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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.