



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**MEROLA PRESENTS SUSAN GRAHAM WITH
DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD**

San Francisco, CA – July 17, 2012 – The Merola Opera Program presented mezzo-soprano Susan Graham with the Merola Distinguished Alumni Award at a private reception on Saturday, July 14, 2012. The award, which has only been given out six times in the program’s 54 year history, is given to recognize extraordinary contributions to the world of opera by graduates of the Merola Opera Program. Susan Graham will join past winners Thomas Hampson, Patrick Summers, Ruth Ann Swenson, Carol Vaness, Deborah Voigt and Dolora Zajick as a recipient of Merola’s highest honor.



“This award recognizes those Merola alumni that have gone on to forge truly remarkable careers – careers that change the face of opera. As one of the world’s foremost stars of opera and recital, the compelling and versatile Susan Graham is most deserving of this honor,” said Merola Board President Donna Blacker. “Regarded as ‘America’s Favorite mezzo’ by *Gramophone* magazine, Susan’s astonishing voice, presence and charisma have captivated audiences around the world. Merola is extremely proud to have her as a distinguished alumna.”



“Merola changes the lives of young singers, making possible something that, 25 years ago, I never dreamed would happen to me. It provides a springboard and exposure to the opera world and as they say in New York, ‘If you can make it there, you’ll make it anywhere.’ I cherish this award and Merola will be in my heart forever.”

Celebrated as an expert in French music, Graham was named Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur by the French government. Recently, she sang Mahler’s *Rückert-Lieder* with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony and recorded the song cycle for the Symphony’s own record label. Other recent performances include: Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier* with the Metropolitan Opera; Dido in Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and Nicholas McGegan; Berlioz’s *Damnation de Faust* with Lyric Opera of Chicago, which she also

performed during the 2008-09 season at the Met and in *The Met: Live in HD*; the title role in Handel's *Xerxes* with San Francisco Opera; and Chausson's *Poème de l'amour et de la mer* with the New York Philharmonic under Sir Andrew Davis.

Known for her performances reviving Gluck operas, Graham sang the title role of *Iphigénie en Tauride* in a new production staged for her by the Metropolitan Opera which was also performed at Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera and Royal Opera House.

At home and abroad, Susan Graham has sung leading roles from the 17th to 20th centuries in the great opera houses of the world, including Milan's La Scala, Royal Opera House, Vienna State Opera, Opéra national de Paris, Dresden's Semperoper and the Salzburg Festival. In addition, she has appeared with many of the world's leading conductors and orchestras.



Born in New Mexico and raised in Texas, Susan Graham studied at Texas Tech University and the Manhattan School of Music, which awarded her an honorary Doctor of Music in 2008. She won the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the Schwabacher Award from San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Program, as well as a Career Grant from the Richard Tucker Music Foundation. Graham was *Musical America's* 2004 Vocalist of the Year, and in 2006 her hometown of Midland, Texas declared September 5 “Susan Graham Day” in perpetuity.

PHOTO CREDIT

Susan Graham / Drew Altizer

Susan Graham with Jean Kellogg and Donna Blacker / Drew Altizer

Susan Graham with her Merola Sponsors Bruce and Fran Walker / Drew Altizer

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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, the 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.