



MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM ANNOUNCES 2021 SEASON

**SUMMER FESTIVAL INCLUDES RECITAL FEATURING WORKS BY WOMEN
AND PEOPLE OF COLOR, MEROLA GRAND FINALE, AND DIGITAL PROJECT
June 14 – July 31, 2021**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (4 May 2021) – The **Merola Opera Program**, one of the most prestigious and selective opera training programs in the world, has announced its 2021 season, presenting performances by the rising opera stars of tomorrow. After the recent retirement of Sheri Greenawald, this is Merola's first season under the new San Francisco Opera Center leadership of Carrie-Ann Matheson (Artistic Director) and Markus Beam (General Manager). Responding to today's pandemic circumstances, the pair have worked to create a safe program that will enable the public to enjoy a first look at future stars, while allowing the selected artists to receive the coveted training offered by the renowned Merola Opera Program. The 2021 Merola Summer Festival welcomes 27 Merola artists selected from more than 800 international applicants. The majority of this season's young artists were invited to participate in last year's program but were unable to attend in person due to pandemic restrictions. The artists, most of whom are currently studying in the United States, originally come from as far away as China, Colombia, Germany, and Russia, as well as across the U.S. and Canada. The Merola artists will perform in a special recital July 3rd titled ***What the Heart Desires***, featuring works by women and people of color, and will conclude the season July 31st with the **Merola Grand Finale**. Under consideration are both outdoor and indoor locations, as well as potential live streaming of the performances, with details to be announced in the coming weeks. This year for the first time ever, Merola artists will also be featured in an exciting digital program of operatic highlights, titled ***Back Home: Through the Stage Door***, conceived for film and released online July 30th. Information on how to attend performances will be available at www.merola.org.

When the 2020 Merola training program was canceled due to the pandemic, the young artists who had been accepted were instead offered a series of virtual workshops and online training in fields such as foreign languages, acting, and movement, as well as master chats with opera and theater luminaries. This year, the artists will be in San Francisco and will participate in an intensive training program comprised of seminars, lessons, and coaching in various aspects of a professional performance career. A COVID Manager will assist throughout the summer with safety protocols for classes, rehearsals, and performances.

Gearing up for a season like none before are the new Merola artistic team, **Carrie-Ann Matheson** and **Markus Beam (Merola '02)**. In addition to providing this season's young artists with the world-class training for which the Merola program is famed, the team is committed to providing new curricula geared toward cultivating individual artistry and preparing the young

artists for extramusical aspects of a performance career. As the pandemic continues to reinforce the need for companies to adapt to the digital demands of the industry, training this season will expand to include performing for the camera, as well as perfecting presentations for live audiences.

About the principals:

Carrie-Ann Matheson (San Francisco Opera Center Artistic Director) has a multi-faceted international career as a pianist, conductor, and educator. She began her career at the Metropolitan Opera, where she was a tenured member of the full-time music staff as assistant conductor, prompter, pianist, and vocal coach. As a recital pianist, she has performed with many of the world's most renowned opera singers, including Rolando Villazón, Jonas Kaufmann, Piotr Beczala, Benjamin Bernheim, Diana Damrau, Thomas Hampson, and Joyce DiDonato. In addition to her work with opera singers, she has performed in chamber music concerts with members of the New York Philharmonic, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, and Philharmonia Zürich. Ms. Matheson assisted such renowned conductors as James Levine, Fabio Luisi, Yannick Nezet-Seguin, and Gianandrea Noseda, before making her conducting debut in 2015 at Opernhaus Zürich, where she conducted works such as *La finta giardiniera*, *Don Pasquale*, and *Iphigénie en Tauride*, among others. Throughout her career, Ms. Matheson has been dedicated to nurturing emerging artists, and has collaborated with some of the world's most prestigious training programs, including the Atkins Young Artist Program (The Mariinsky Theatre), International Opera Studio (Opernhaus Zürich), Lindemann Young Artist Development Program (Metropolitan Opera), and Ryan Opera Center (Lyric Opera of Chicago). She holds degrees from the University of Prince Edward Island (B.Mus.Ed), the Cleveland Institute of Music (M.Mus in Collaborative Piano), the Manhattan School of Music (Professional Studies Diploma in Vocal Accompanying), and is a graduate of the Metropolitan Opera's renowned Lindemann Young Artist Development Program and an alumna and former faculty member of the Music Academy of the West.

Markus Beam (San Francisco Opera Center General Manager) has enjoyed a wide-ranging career as an administrator, artist manager, coach, and performer. Formerly a Vice President and Artist Manager in the Vocal Division of IMG Artists, he worked with a diverse roster of artists encompassing both emerging artists and some of the most sought-after names in opera, including multiple graduates of both the Merola Opera Program and the San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows Program. His clients performed regularly with the world's leading opera companies and were consistently in demand on international concert stages. Particularly passionate about the development of emerging artists, Beam has maintained an active coaching and consulting practice, leading group seminars and one-on-one sessions at many of the country's premier training programs, helping artists define and clarify personal goals, develop actionable career plans, and fully cultivate their unique artistry and voices. Before his career in artist management and consulting, Beam performed extensively both in Europe and the United States. A proud graduate of the Merola Opera Program ('02), Beam holds degrees from Philadelphia's Academy of Vocal Arts, University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of

Music, and the North Carolina School of the Arts. Beam also trained as a young artist at Santa Fe Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, and Wolf Trap Opera.

The **Merola Opera Program** is widely regarded as the foremost opera training program for aspiring singers, pianists, and stage directors. Merola nurtures the opera stars of tomorrow with master classes and private coaching with opera's most accomplished singers, conductors, and directors. Participants also receive training in operatic repertoire, languages, diction, acting, stage movement, and professional development. Offered free of charge for all participants, the Merola Opera Program is unique in the industry in many ways. It is the only young artist program to provide financial support to developing artists for five years following their participation, offering aid for essential career development expenses including coaching, language classes, and audition travel. In summer 2020, the company initiated the [Merola Artists Emergency Fund](#) to offer much-needed financial assistance to those artists who have lost wages and incurred unreimbursed expenses as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This year's Merola Opera Program artists include:

Sopranos

Emily Blair, *Hoffman Estates, Illinois*
Catherine Goode, *Friendswood, Texas*
Magdalena Kuźma, *New York, New York*
Celeste Morales, *San Antonio, Texas*
Ashley Marie Robillard, *Norton, Massachusetts*
Mikayla Sager, *Vancouver, BC, Canada*
Johanna Will, *Dresden, Germany*

Mezzo-sopranos

Gabrielle Barkidjija, *River Forest, Illinois*
Gabrielle Beteag, *Atlanta, Georgia*
Jesse Mashburn, *Hartselle, Alabama*
Nikola Printz, *Novato, California*

Tenors

Victor Cardamone, *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*
Edward Graves, *Oxon Hill, Maryland*
Gabriel Hernandez, *Tampa, Florida*
Philippe L'Esperance, *Grafton, Massachusetts*
Tianchi Zhang, *Huainan, Anhui, China*

Baritones

Thomas Lynch, *Lynbrook, New York*
Samson McCrady, *Tucson, Arizona*
Laureano Quant, *Barranquilla, Colombia*

Bass-baritones

Ben Brady, *Denver, Colorado*

Andrew Dwan, *Mountain View, California*

Pianists

Erica Xiaoyan Guo, *Tianjin, China*

Yang Lin, *Shanghai, China*

Anna Smigelskaya, *Saint Petersburg, Russia*

Shiyu Tan, *Changsha, Hunan, China*

Marika Yasuda, *Williamsburg, Virginia*

Stage Director

Audrey Chait, *Menlo Park, California*

This year's Merola Opera Program faculty members include:

Digital Project Director:

David Paul

Recital Co-Curators:

Ronnita Miller (Merola '05)

Nicholas Phan

Visiting Artist and Master Coach:

Denyce Graves*

Master Coaches:

Alan Darling

Warren Jones*

Martin Katz*

Jonathan Kelly

Carrie-Ann Matheson*

Howard Watkins*

Voice Teachers:

Deborah Birnbaum

Julia Faulkner

César Ulloa

Diction Coaches:

Alessandra Cattani

Patricia Kristof Moy

Anja Strauss

Career Coaching:

Markus Beam (Merola '02)

Mental Health Clinician:

Dana Fonteneau – Whole Hearted Musician

Nutrition and Physical Wellness Clinician:

Duncan Rock

PR/Branding Clinician:

Andrew Ousley – Unison Media

Personal Finance Clinician:

Tiffany Soricelli – Virtuoso: Advising for Artists

*Will be featured in Public Master Classes available for streaming by Merola members.

Performance Schedule:

What the Heart Desires – July 3, 2021

Celebrating the diversity of America's voice in song, this recital co-curated by tenor Nicholas Phan and mezzo-soprano Ronnita Miller (Merola '05) will explore the many things our hearts desire. Featuring compositions by women and people of color, the program will include selections about romantic desire, physical desire, and the longing for home, for rest, for peace, and for a better world.

Sought after as a curator and programmer, in addition to his work as Artistic Director of the Collaborative Arts Institute of Chicago (CAIC), Nicholas Phan has created programs for broadcast on WFMT and WQXR, and served as guest curator for projects with the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Laguna Beach Music Festival, Apollo's Fire, and San Francisco Performances, where he served as the vocal artist-in-residence from 2014-2018. His programs often examine themes of identity, highlight unfairly underrepresented voices from history, and strive to underline the relevance of music from all periods to the currents of the present day.

Since completing her seventh season as a member of the ensemble at Deutsche Oper Berlin, American mezzo-soprano Ronnita Miller (a 2005 alumna of the Merola Opera Program) continued her upward career trajectory in the 2020-21 season with performances at The Atlanta Opera and Deutsche Oper Berlin. She has made appearances at major opera houses including The Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera Chicago, San Francisco Opera, and Los Angeles Opera, as well as with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, and Berlin Philharmonic, among others. In addition to performing, Miller has conducted masterclasses at St. Petersburg College in St. Petersburg, Florida; outreach classes in New York City; written for online publications including *Interview En L'air*.

Back Home: Through the Stage Door – July 30, 2021

Conceived and directed for film by award-winning director David Paul, *Back Home: Through the Stage Door* showcases the 2021 Merola artists in an exciting and innovative digital format, highlighting the program's imaginative approach to adapting to the digital demands of the industry. Paul's work has been praised by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* for its energy, humor, and emotional depth, and has been seen across four continents in five languages. Recent credits include productions for LA Opera, the Metropolitan Opera/Juilliard, Washington National Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, Arizona Opera, North Carolina Opera, Wolf Trap Opera, Opera Saratoga, and the Music Academy of the West.

Merola Grand Finale – July 31, 2021

The Summer Festival concludes with the **Merola Grand Finale**, a concert featuring all the artists of the 2021 Merola Opera Program in a dazzling array of opera's most exciting arias and ensembles. Directed by 2021 Merola Apprentice Stage Director Audrey Chait, this performance showcases the hard work and extraordinary talent of the Merola artists.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: The **Merola Opera Program**, one of the most prestigious and selective opera training programs in the world, has announced its 2021 season, presenting performances by the rising opera stars of tomorrow. After the recent retirement of Sheri Greenawald, this is Merola's first season under the new San Francisco Opera Center leadership of Carrie-Ann Matheson (Artistic Director) and Markus Beam (General Manager). Responding to today's pandemic circumstances, the pair have worked to create a safe program that will enable the public to enjoy a first look at future stars, while allowing the selected artists to receive the coveted training offered by the renowned Merola Opera Program. The 2021 Merola Summer Festival welcomes 27 Merola artists selected from more than 800 international applicants. The majority of this season's young artists were invited to participate in last year's program but were unable to attend in person due to pandemic restrictions. The artists, most of whom are currently studying in the United States, originally come from as far away as China, Colombia, Germany, and Russia, as well as across the U.S. and Canada.

WHERE: Locations/viewing options to be announced.

WHEN: ***What the Heart Desires*** – July 3, 2021

Back Home: Through the Stage Door – July 30, 2021

Merola Grand Finale – July 31, 2021

INFO: Individual event information available at www.merola.org.

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PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available here:
<http://www.cbpr.co/press/MerolaOperaProgram>