



MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM ANNOUNCES ANNUAL BENEFIT GALA

UN GALA IN MASCHERA

IN HONOR OF RETIRED MEROLA ARTISTIC DIRECTOR SHERI GREENAWALD

5:00pm (PDT), Saturday, April 10, 2021

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (1 March 2021) – Opera lovers everywhere are invited to join the acclaimed **Merola Opera Program** for its first-ever virtual benefit gala, ***Un Gala in Maschera***. This musical evening honors Merola Artistic Director Sheri Greenawald (2002-2020), celebrating her nearly two decades as Director of the San Francisco Opera Center and Artistic Director of the Merola Opera Program. The evening will feature a festive concert showcasing illustrious Merola alumni including sopranos Leah Crocetto (Merola '08) and Amber R. Monroe (Merola '19), mezzo-soprano Ashley Dixon (Merola '15/'17), baritones Joo Won Kang (Merola '11) and Efraín Solís (Merola '13), bass-baritone Christian Pursell (Merola '17), and pianist Ronny Michael Greenberg (Merola '14).

In recognition of the impact Sheri Greenawald has had on generations of young artists, ***Un Gala in Maschera*** will benefit two of her passions: the Sheri Greenawald Endowment Fund, which creates a permanent legacy that will provide support for Merola's distinguished faculty in perpetuity; and the Sheri Greenawald Artists Support Fund, which will directly support living stipends for the young artists in the 2021 Merola summer training program.

Un Gala in Maschera will be presented **5:00pm (PDT), Saturday, April 10, 2021.** For more information and to purchase tickets (\$25-\$125 per household) please visit merola.org/gala2021.

San Francisco Bay Area patrons may have appetizers and dinners delivered to their homes by Culinary Excellence to enhance their experience. Details and pricing are available at merola.org/gala2021. The first twenty-five orders will receive a special Hafner Vineyard wine gift pack.

The exciting lineup of artists headlining *Un Gala In Maschera* all participated in the Merola program during Sheri's tenure. Acclaimed soprano **Leah Crocetto** (Merola '08) went on to perform leading roles for San Francisco Opera, The Metropolitan Opera, and Washington National Opera, as well as for major companies around the world. Mezzo-soprano **Ashley Dixon** (Merola '15/'17) and baritone **Efraín Solís** (Merola '13) are both current Resident Artists at Opera San José. Dixon was a Grand Finals Winner in the 2018 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and has appeared with Los Angeles Opera and other major companies; Solís was a Grand Finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 2013 and has since been seen with leading opera companies throughout the nation. Soprano **Amber R. Monroe** (Merola '19) is welcomed back after impressive performances in Merola's Schwabacher Summer Concert and the Merola Grand Finale. A decorated artist, baritone **Joo Won Kang** (Merola '11) was the first-prize winner of Fort Worth Opera's 2014 McCammon Voice Competition and has garnered top prizes in esteemed vocal competitions throughout the nation, while bass-baritone **Christian Pursell** (Merola '17) has made acclaimed appearances at Houston Grand Opera and other major opera companies. Pianist **Ronny Michael Greenberg** (Merola '14) has toured internationally, performing in opera houses and concert halls including Carnegie Hall, the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House, and more. Greenberg and Pursell are co-producing the musical portion of the evening through their company P&G Productions.

Regarding Greenawald's invaluable contributions to the Merola Opera Program, Gala Chair Christopher Wiseman said: "Sheri has been a true friend to the Merola Opera Program and her artistic vision has inspired a generation of talented artists. It is our pleasure and privilege to honor her at our 2021 Benefit Gala." Jean Kellogg, Merola Executive Director, added: "I never failed to marvel at Sheri's total devotion to our young artists and their training, and her brilliant 'ear' for identifying the talents who are the future of opera, including taking a chance on 'wild card' singers who don't fit the conventional mold."

Merola Opera Program is widely regarded as the foremost opera training program for aspiring singers, coach accompanists, 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.

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WHAT: Opera lovers everywhere are invited to join the **acclaimed Merola Opera Program** for its first-ever virtual benefit gala, ***Un Gala in Maschera***. The celebration features a professionally produced concert by illustrious Merola alumni who have gone on to make their mark on stages around the world, including sopranos Leah Crocetto and Amber R. Monroe, mezzo-soprano Ashley Dixon, baritones Joo Won Kang and Efraín Solís, bass-baritone Christian Pursell, and pianist Ronny Michael Greenberg. Attendees are invited to join this virtual gala from home, raising a glass to recently retired Merola Artistic Director Sheri Greenawald (2002-2020), honoring her nearly two decades as Director of the San Francisco Opera Center and Artistic Director of the Merola Opera Program. To enhance the experience, patrons in the San Francisco Bay Area may purchase appetizers or dinner for two for home delivery.

WHEN: **5:00pm (PDT), Saturday, April 10, 2021**

WHERE: Available to stream – a link to tune in to will be emailed to ticket buyers shortly before the event.

TICKETS: All tickets admit one household, and are available for purchase until Saturday, April 10, 2021. The prices are as follows:

Young Patrons (under age 40): \$25 | Regular Admission: \$64 | Premium: \$125*

**All premium ticket buyers will receive an invitation to a special virtual event featuring Merola alumni later in 2021.*

Viewers throughout the San Francisco Bay Area may purchase a deluxe appetizer assortment (\$85 for two persons) or a lavish dinner for two (\$150), delivered to their homes by Culinary Experience.

INFO: For more information or to purchase tickets, the public may visit <https://merola.org/gala2021> or via phone at **(415) 936-2311**.

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