SAN FRANCISCO OPERA CENTER PRESENTS THE 2010 SCHWABACHER DEBUT RECITAL SERIES

Twenty-eighth season includes performances by tenor Eleazar Rodriguez and baritone Michael Sumuel; pianist Allen Perriello with Adler Fellows Susannah Biller and Austin Kness; and soprano Leah Crocetto

SAN FRANCISCO (February 2, 2010)–San Francisco Opera Center presents the 28th season of the Schwabacher Debut Recital Series, on February 21, March 28 and April 18 at Temple Emanu-El's Martin Meyer Sanctuary (Two Lake Street, at Arguello, in San Francisco). The annual Schwabacher Debut Recital Series presents recitals by artists who have participated in the programs of the San Francisco Opera Center and Merola Opera Program and offers Bay Area audiences the unique opportunity to hear gifted young singers in an intimate setting.

The 2010 Series begins on Sunday, February 21, 2009, with Merola Opera Program alumni tenor Eleazar Rodriguez and baritone Michael Sumuel. Rodriguez, a San Francisco Conservatory of Music student originally from Piedras Negras, Mexico, appeared as Federico in Merola's 2009 production of Pietro Mascagni's *L'Amico Fritz* and also performed the role of Lindoro in scenes from Gioachino Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri.* A native of Odessa, Texas, Michael Sumuel is currently a member of the Houston Grand Opera Studio and appeared with Merola Opera Program in scenes from Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Medium (*Mr. Gobineau) and Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème (*Schaunard) and covered the role of Guglielmo in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. Eleazar Rodriguez will perform a selection of songs by Henri Duparc, Charles Gounod and Ottorino Respighi as well as *Poema en forma de canciones*, a song cycle by Spanish composer Joaquín Turina. Sumuel will perform Robert Schumann's *Liederkreis* as well as three English songs by Ralph Vaughan Williams, Michael Head and Gerald Finzi. Together the duo will sing three duets by Schumann, Gounod and

Manuel Fernández Caballero. The recital will be accompanied by San Francisco Opera Center Director of Musical Studies Mark Morash.

The series continues on Sunday, March 28 with Adler Fellow pianist and apprentice coach Allen Perriello performing Hugo Wolf's *Spanisches Liederbuch* with current Adler Fellows soprano Susannah Biller and baritone Austin Kness. The final recital of the series on Sunday, April 18 will feature soprano Leah Crocetto, a current Adler Fellow, who will sing popular works by Rachmaninoff, Liszt and the Gershwins. Crocetto will also be accompanied by Mark Morash.

The Schwabacher Debut Recital Series has been endowed in perpetuity by the generosity of the late James Schwabacher. A celebrated Bay Area singer, recitalist, scholar and teacher, James Schwabacher is a co-founder of the Merola Opera Program. The Schwabacher Debut Recital Series has introduced the artistry of world-renowned opera singers, including Susan Graham, Anna Netrebko, Deborah Voigt, Brian Asawa and Thomas Hampson. The recitals offer a rare opportunity to hear a wealth of song literature ranging from baroque masterpieces and Romantic-era classics to newly commissioned works.

Tickets & Information

All performances take place at Temple Emanu-El's Martin Meyer Sanctuary (Two Lake Street, at Arguello, in San Francisco). Single tickets for the Schwabacher Debut Recital Series are $25; a three-recital subscription is $60. Tickets may be purchased by calling the San Francisco Opera Box Office (Mon. 10 am-5 pm, Tues.-Fri. 10 am-6 pm) at (415) 864-3330. Student Rush tickets are available for $10 at Temple Emanu-El 30 minutes prior to each recital (limit of two tickets per person; valid ID is required), subject to availability.

PROGRAM 1: Sun. February 21, 5:30 pm
Eleazar Rodriguez, tenor
Michael Sumuel, baritone
Mark Morash, piano
Eleazar Rodriguez and Michael Sumuel, two 2009 Merola Opera Program alumni, perform a recital of favorites by Respighi, Schumann and Tosti; the duo will be accompanied by San Francisco Opera Center Director of Musical Studies Mark Morash.

PROGRAM 2: Sun. March 28, 5:30 pm
Pianist Allen Perriello presents Hugo Wolf's *Spanisches Liederbuch*
Susannah Biller, soprano
Austin Kness, baritone
Pianist Allen Perriello presents Hugo Wolf's song cycle *Spanisches Liederbuch* featuring Adler Fellows Susannah Biller and Austin Kness.

PROGRAM 3: Sun. April 18, 5:30 pm
Leah Crocetto, soprano
Mark Morash, piano
Adler Fellow Leah Crocetto sings popular works by Rachmaninoff, Liszt and the Gershwins; Crocetto will be accompanied by Mark Morash.

About the Artists

Soprano and first-year Adler Fellow **Susannah Biller** is an alumna of the 2009 Merola Opera Program, where she sang Caterina (*L'Amico Fritz*) and performed in the Schwabacher Summer Concert as Euridice (*Orfeo ed Euridice*), Musetta (*La Bohème*), Elvira (*L'Italiana in Algeri*), and Monica (*The Medium*). While at the University of Tennessee, Biller studied voice under George Bitzas and performed roles such as Gretel (*Hansel and Gretel*), First Lady (*The Magic Flute*), Susanna (*The Marriage of Figaro*), and Mary Warren (*The Crucible*). She received her master's degree in music from Northwestern University, winning numerous awards and performing Mélisande (*Pelléas et Mélisande*), Nannetta (*Falstaff*), and Amy (*Little Women*). Biller made her professional debut singing Titania (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) with Opera North (New Hampshire). She was a winner in the Metropolitan Opera Mid-South District 2008–09 auditions.

Soprano **Leah Crocetto** made her San Francisco Opera debut as Sister Dolcina (*Suor Angelica*) in the Company's Fall 2009 production of Puccini's *Il Trittico*. The second-year Adler Fellow recently appeared as Estelle in Hugo Weisgall's *The Stronger* with San Francisco Opera Center and, as a 2008 member of the Merola Opera Program, performed scenes from *Manon* (singing the title role) and *Don Pasquale* (Norina). She has worked with Riccardo Muti and the Chicago Symphony on the Verdi Requiem and was the soprano soloist in the work with Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Crocetto's numerous awards include First Place, People's Choice, and the Spanish Prize in the 2009 José Iturbi International Music Competition in Los Angeles; a 2009 San Francisco Foundation Artist's Grant; a 2008 Shoshana Foundation Award; second place in the Florida Suncoast Opera Guild Competition; and first prize in the Bel Canto Foundation Competition. Crocetto will be the soprano soloist in Schubert's Mass No. 2 with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony in February 2010.

Baritone and second-year Adler Fellow **Austin Kness** sang Sciarrone (*Tosca*) and Marquis d'Obigny (*La Traviata*) with the Company this past summer, and recently appeared as Marco (*Gianni Schicchi*) in this fall's *Il Trittico*. An alumnus of the Merola Opera Program, he performed the title role in Merola's 2008 production of *Don Giovanni*. Kness received his bachelor's degree from the University of Northern Iowa and is pursuing a master's degree at Indiana University. He has performed with Indiana University Opera Theater as Count Almaviva (*Le Nozze di Figaro)*, Don Giovanni, Escamillo (*Carmen)*, and Eddie Carbone (*A View from the Bridge)*. His concert credits include Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* with Indiana University and the Brahms Requiem with the Bloomington Chamber Singers. Kness is a former member of the Des Moines Metropolitan Opera Apprentice Program (2006–07), where he performed the roles of Moralès (*Carmen)* and Count Ceprano (*Rigoletto)*. The baritone has also sung the roles of Fiorello (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia)* and Moralès with Cedar Rapids Opera Theater. Kness was a finalist in the West Palm Beach Voice Competition in 2007 who participated in the Kennedy Center Conservatory Project, where he represented the Jacobs School of Music.

Mark Morash is a conductor and pianist originally from Halifax, Canada. He currently serves as the director of musical studies for San Francisco Opera Center. He has also led productions and concerts with the Merola Opera Program and Western Opera Theater. In recent years, Morash has also led performances of *Rigoletto* with Opera Colorado as well as *Don Giovanni* and *The Turn of the Screw* for the Lincoln Theater in Yountville, California. His work with the San Francisco Opera Center has included such varied repertoire as *Così fan tutte, Die Fledermaus, The Merry Wives of Windsor,* Donizetti's *Rita*, Pasatieri's *The Seagull*, Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona* and Ibert's *Angélique*. As a collaborative pianist, Morash's performances have taken him throughout North America, Japan and Russia. He has collaborated with such renowned artists as Michael Schade, Tracy Dahl and Sheri Greenawald, and he has accompanied numerous emerging singers in San Francisco Opera's esteemed Schwabacher Debut Recitals. Morash has also been involved with the Opera Center of Pittsburgh Opera, Wolf Trap Opera, the Banff Centre, and Hawaii Opera Theater and is a former faculty member of the University of Toronto.

Coach and accompanist **Allen Perriello,** a second-year Adler fellow, is an alumnus of the 2008 Merola Opera Program. During the 2009 San Francisco Opera season, Perriello served as a member of the music staff on the productions of *Porgy and Bess, Il Trovatore,* and *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. Other professional engagements include Opera Cleveland, Rising Star Opera Theater, and Ash Lawn Opera. His other coaching credits include *Hänsel und Gretel, Albert Herring, La Bohème, Dido and Aeneas, Miss Lonelyhearts, Amahl and the Night Visitors, Il Barbiere di Siviglia, Werther, L'enfant et les Sortileges, L'Elisir d'Amore, The Merry Widow, West Side Story,* and *The Consul*. Perriello served as chorus master for Cincinnati Conservatory of Music's productions of *La Bohème* and *L'Elisir d'Amore*. Perriello holds a master's degree in collaborative piano from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and a bachelor's degree in piano performance and music education from Ithaca College.

A native of Piedras Negras, Mexico, **Eleazar Rodriguez** is a Merola Opera Program alumnus who appeared as Federico in Merola Opera Program's 2009 production of Pietro Mascagni's *L'Amico Fritz* and as Lindoro in scenes from Gioachino Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri.* The tenor is a recipient of the Plácido Domingo voice scholarship given by Sociedad Internacional de Valores de Arte Mexicano and is a top prize winner in the Carlo Morelli National Competition in Mexico City. Rodriguez has appeared in recital at the Kennedy Center as part of the Center's conservatory project series and has performed Count Almaviva (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia)* with Fremont Opera; Tamino (*Die Zauberflöte*) in

Tel Aviv, Israel; Salvador Dalí in David Conte's opera, *Famous*; Lara in *America Tropical*, also by David Conte; and created the title role of Caesar in the San Francisco world premiere of *Young Caesar* by Lou Harrison. Rodriguez earned a music diploma from the Escuela Superior de Musica de la Universidad Autonoma de Coahuila in 2003, and he is presently studying at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music

Merola Opera Program alumnus **Michael Sumuel** is a first-year artist in the Houston Grand Opera Studio. He appeared with Merola as Guglielmo in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Così fan tutte* as well as in scenes from Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Medium (*Mr. Gobineau) and Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème (*Schaunard). This past season at Houston Grand Opera, he sang the role of Dulcamara in performances of Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love* and one of the Four Nobles in Wagner's *Lohengrin*. The Texas native placed third in the 2009 Eleanor McCollum Competition at Houston Grand Opera, and he won both the Fielder Grant for Career Advancement and Houston Tuesday Music Club competitions. He was also a first place winner of the Dallas Opera Guild Vocal Competition. In concert he has appeared as the bass soloist in Fauré's Requiem and Handel's *Messiah*. Mr. Sumuel holds a bachelor's degree in vocal performance from Columbus State University and a master's degree in music from Rice University. Upcoming performances include Namuroff in Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades* with Houston Grand Opera.

About San Francisco Opera Center and Merola Opera Program

San Francisco Opera Center was created in 1982 by then–General Director Terence A. McEwen to oversee the operation and administration of the education and training programs initiated by Kurt Herbert Adler in 1954. Providing a coordinated sequence of performance and study opportunities for young artists, San Francisco Opera Center represents a new era in which young artists of major operatic potential can develop through intensive training and performance, under the aegis of a major international opera company. Now under the guidance of its fourth director, Sheri Greenawald, and San Francisco Opera General Director David Gockley, the Opera Center has trained and introduced many young stars from around the world to the international opera stage through its resident artist programs such as the Adler Fellowship.

Initially founded as the San Francisco Opera/Affiliate Artists program, the Adler Fellowship Program is one of the nation's most prestigious training programs for advanced singers. Each year, Adler Fellows are sponsored by individual donors to help cover the cost of their fellowship. Sponsorships range from $5,000-$100,000, and sponsors affiliated with the Adler Program have the opportunity to attend private studio classes with the Fellows and develop nurturing relationships with them. Alumni from the Adler Fellowship Program include sopranos Laura Claycomb, Nicolle Foland, Nancy Gustafson, Mary Mills, Patricia Racette, Ruth Ann Swenson and Deborah Voigt; mezzo-sopranos Zheng Cao and Dolora Zajick; countertenor Brian Asawa; baritones Mark Delavan and David Okerlund; and bass-baritones Monte Pederson and John Relyea.

One of the oldest and most acclaimed training programs of its kind, the Merola Opera Program for aspiring opera professionals offers up-and-coming singers, coach-accompanists and stage directors the opportunity of intense study and performance during an eleven-week summer program. Each year, hundreds of artists from throughout the world vie for approximately 30 coveted spots in the summer program. Admission is based solely on talent rather than financial ability; there is no charge to the participants. Named for San Francisco Opera's first general director, Gaetano Merola, the program began during the 1954-55 Season and established its full training program in 1957. Alumni of the program include Sylvia McNair, Anna Netrebko, Patricia Racette, Ruth Ann Swenson, Carol Vaness,

Deborah Voigt, Susan Graham, Dolora Zajick, Brian Asawa, Thomas Hampson, Rolando Villazón, and Patrick Summers. An independent non-profit organization, the Merola Opera Program operates in collaboration with San Francisco Opera Center and San Francisco Opera.

For more information on the San Francisco Opera Center and the Adler Fellowship and Merola Opera Program, visit www.sfopera.com.

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This press release and downloadable 2009–10 season photographs are available at sfopera.com/press. For further press information, please contact: Julia Inouye [415.565.6430 / jinouye@sfopera.com] or Robin Freeman [415.565.6451 / rfreeman@sfopera.com].