



**2009 GEORGE LONDON FOUNDATION AWARDS COMPETITION HONOREES
INCLUDE SEVEN ARTISTS AFFILIATED WITH THE MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM
AND SAN FRANCISCO OPERA CENTER ADLER FELLOWSHIP**

**Adler Fellow Heidi Melton, Merola Alumna Amanda Majeski
and Former Adler Fellow Sean Panikkar among top award winners**

SAN FRANCISCO, March 26, 2009 – Soprano Heidi Melton (current Adler Fellow and 2006 Merola alumna), soprano Amanda Majeski (2008 Merola alumna) and tenor Sean Panikkar (2004 Merola alumnus and 2005-06 Adler Fellow) were each awarded the 2009 George London Award at the George London Foundation Awards Competition held on March 20 in New York City. One of the oldest juried vocal competitions in the United States and Canada, the George London Foundation Awards Competition gives over \$70,000 each year to promising young North American opera singers. Harolyn Blackwell, Bruce Donnell, Rosalind Elias, Ernst Ludwig Gausmann, Alfred Hubay, Nora London and George Shirley served as jury members for the 2009 competition.

Melton, Majeski and Panikkar are among the six singers awarded the top prize of \$10,000 each. Heidi Melton received the George London/Kirsten Flagstad Memorial Award for singers with Wagnerian potential. Among the winners of a \$1,000 Encouragement Award are mezzo-soprano Daveda Karanas (current Adler Fellow and 2007 Merola alumna) and baritone Michael Anthony McGee (2006 Merola alumnus). Tenor Noah Stewart (2006 Merola alumnus and 2007 Adler Fellow) and baritone Liam Bonner (2005 Merola alumnus) were among the 26 competition finalists who received Honorable Mention recognition.

The George London Foundation for Singers is a non-profit organization which has presented awards for over thirty-five years to outstanding young professional opera singers. Initially created under the auspices of the National Opera Institute, the awards program has been administered since 1990 by the Foundation in New York as a living legacy to the late bass-baritone. The annual

competition in New York City for American and Canadian singers age 35 and under is one of the most prestigious contests in North America for outstanding young singers. Renowned artists such as Christine Brewer, Renée Fleming, Catherine Malfitano, James Morris, Matthew Polenzani, Sondra Radvanovsky, Neil Shicoff and Dawn Upshaw have received George London Awards.

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.

One of the oldest and most acclaimed training programs of its kind, the **Merola Opera Program** is an independent nonprofit organization (Patrick Wilken, President) which operates in collaboration with San Francisco Opera Center (Sheri Greenawald, Director) and San Francisco Opera (David Gockley, General Director). Merola Opera Program has nurtured the careers of more than 1,000 up-and-coming singers, accompanists and stage directors since its establishment in 1957. Each year, more than 750 international artists 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. Merola has served as a proving ground for acclaimed artists including: Sylvia McNair, Anna Netrebko, Patricia Racette, Ruth Ann Swenson, Carol Vaness, Deborah Voigt, Susan Graham, Dolora Zajick, Brian Asawa, Gary Lakes, Kurt Streit, Jess Thomas, Rolando Villazón, Thomas Hampson and Patrick Summers.

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.

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

– SFO –

For further press information, please visit sfopera.com/press or contact:

Jon Finck 415.565.6472 / jfinck@sfopera.com

Robin Freeman 415.565.6451 / rfreeman@sfopera.com