



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM
ANNOUNCES PARTICIPANTS FOR ITS 52ND SEASON**

**TWENTY NINE ARTISTS FROM EIGHT COUNTRIES TO PARTICIPATE IN
TWELVE-WEEK INTENSIVE MUSICAL TRAINING PROGRAM**

**2009 SEASON FEATURES PERFORMANCES OF
MASCAGNI'S *L'AMICO FRITZ* AND MOZART'S *COSÌ FAN TUTTE***

**TWO SCHWABACHER SUMMER CONCERTS: AT HERBST THEATRE
AND FREE TO THE COMMUNITY AT YERBA BUENA GARDENS**

PROGRAM CULMINATES WITH THE ANNUAL MEROLA GRAND FINALE

SAN FRANCISCO – April 27, 2009 – The **Merola Opera Program** today announced the twenty-three singers, five apprentice coaches and one apprentice stage director who will participate in the 52nd season of the Merola Opera Program to run from June 1 to August 22, 2009. One of the world's most prestigious young artist training programs, the Merola Opera Program was founded in 1957 and has since nurtured the careers of thousands of artists, including superstar **Anna Netrebko**, who will perform with the San Francisco Opera during the 2008-2009 Season.

Selected from hundreds of applicants through an extensive worldwide audition and application process, the 2009 season's twenty-nine artists come from eight countries: United States, Canada, Ukraine, Israel, The Republic of Korea, Mexico, The Republic of Georgia and The People's Republic of China. Each year, more than 750 international artists vie for approximately 30 coveted spots in the summer program which is offered free of charge for all participants. The Merola Opera Program is an independent non-profit organization (501c3) which operates in collaboration with the San Francisco Opera.

“Merola is renowned in the artistic community worldwide for the quality of its program,” stated Board President Patrick Wilken, “This quality is the direct result of our singular focus on training, the dedication of our Board of Directors and staff as well as our incredible artistic collaboration with San Francisco Opera. Locally, Merola enjoys an extremely devoted following of supporters who are united by a tremendous love of opera and have a particular interest in nurturing the lives and careers of up-and-coming artists. Merola fans give of their hearts—from financial contributions that make the program possible to providing lodging in their own homes

for these young artists. It is truly a labor of love, ultimately benefitting not only the city of San Francisco, but the international opera community.”

Internationally acclaimed soprano and San Francisco Opera Center Director **Sheri Greenawald** leads the program. Over the length of the program, the young artists will participate in master classes and private coaching sessions with musical luminaries such as **Jane Eaglen, Robin Guarino, Martin Katz** and **Steven Blier**. The participants also receive training in foreign languages, operatic repertory, diction, acting, and stage movement. “We often describe the program as ‘opera boot camp’ because this is truly an intense experience that we offer these young singers,” stated Sheri Greenawald who serves as the program’s artistic director. “These young people are actively engaged in opera morning, noon and night—whether they are rehearsing, being drilled on foreign language pronunciation, getting advice and help on performance attire, or learning to market themselves. This is truly the experience of a lifetime and no one forgets it. That is why you have legendary alumni who, years later, literally ‘sing’ the program’s praises to the international musical world.”

Performance is a key part of the program with artists participating throughout the summer in staged opera productions. Two separate performances will feature arias from various operas, the first presented on Friday, July 10 at 7:30 PM at Herbst Theater and the second offered for free to the community on Sunday, July 12 at 2:00 PM outdoors at Yerba Buena Gardens. The artists will be featured in two full-length operas at the Cowell Theater at Fort Mason. Pietro Mascagni’s *L’Amico Fritz*, directed by **Nic Muni** and conducted by **Warren Jones**, will be presented July 24 at 8:00 PM and July 26 at 2:00 PM. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, directed by **Robin Guarino** and conducted by **Ari Peltó**, will be presented August 7 at 8:00 PM and August 9 at 2:00 PM. The season concludes with the annual Merola Grand Finale on stage in the magnificent War Memorial Opera House on Saturday, August 22 at 7:30 PM.

A full season calendar follows the artist announcement, directly below.

Artist Listing

Sopranos

SUSANNAH BILLER, Georgetown, Tennessee
LARA CIEKIEWICZ, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
KATE CRIST, Agency, Iowa
SARA GARTLAND, St. Paul, Minnesota
LORI GUILBEAU, Golden Meadow, Louisiana

Mezzo-sopranos

MARGARET GAWRYSIK, Geneseo, Illinois
CAITLIN MATHES, Dayville, Connecticut
ELLIE JARRETT, Dallas, Texas
MAYA LAHYANI, Hod-HaSharon, Israel

Contralto

SUZANNE HENDRIX, Charles City, Iowa

Countertenor

RYAN BELONGIE, Beaver Dam, Wisconsin

Tenors

ELEAZAR RODRÍGUEZ, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico
GREGORY CARROLL, Des Moines, Washington
BRIAN JAGDE, Piermont, New York
ALEX MANSOORI, Seattle, Washington
NATHANIEL PEAKE, Humble, Texas

Baritones

ALEKSEY BOGDANOV, Odessa, Ukraine
JOHN CHEST, Greenville, South Carolina
PAUL SCHOLTEN, Muskegon, Michigan
MICHAEL SUMUEL, Odessa, Texas

Bass-baritone

YOHAN YI, Pohang, The Republic of Korea

Basses

EVAN BOYER, Louisville, Kentucky
BENJAMIN LeCLAIR, Royal, Iowa

Apprentice Coaches

KEUN-A LEE, Seoul, The Republic of Korea
STEPHANIE RHODES, Alpine, Utah
TAMARA SANIKIDZE, Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia
SUZY SMITH, Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada
MIAOMIAO WANG, Lanzhou, Gansu, China

Apprentice Stage Director

FERNANDO PARRA BORTÍ, Chihuahua, Mexico

Season Calendar Listing**Tickets on Sale Now**

To purchase tickets, call (415) 864-3330.

To become a member and receive early ticket buying privileges, access to master classes and much more, email mandre@sfopera.com or call (707) 565-6492.

2009 Summer Season Sponsors

Frances K. & Charles D. Field Foundation, Grace A. Diem & Alice E. Siemons Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Schwabacher Summer Concerts

This delightful potpourri of extended scenes from operas by Wagner, Gluck, Menotti, Rossini and Puccini is perfect for both the seasoned opera lover and the uninitiated. Hear the concert in the intimate acoustics of Herbst Theatre on Friday evening, with tickets starting at only \$25 (\$15 for students*), and on Sunday afternoon you can bring a group of family and friends and enjoy the music—and sun—as the Merola participants perform the concert at Yerba Buena Gardens free of charge. (The chosen pieces will feature scenes from *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, *The Medium*, *L’Italiana in Algeri* and *La Bohème*). Conductor Mark Morash, Director Roy Rallo

Indoor Schwabacher Concert

Friday, July 10, 7:30 PM

Herbst Theatre

\$40, \$25 (students)

Outdoor Schwabacher Concert

Sunday, July 12, 2 PM

Yerba Buena Gardens

FREE

***L'Amico Fritz* by Pietro Mascagni**

All's well that ends with a wedding... Fritz Kobus is a wealthy landowner who has sworn to his friend, Rabbi David that he will forever remain a bachelor. Fritz goes so far as to bet David one of his vineyards that he will never marry. However, love is sparked on Fritz's birthday when young Suzel, the daughter of Fritz's tenant, arrives with a gift of flowers. With the threat of her impending marriage to another, Fritz realizes that he has actually fallen in love with Suzel. Eventually—with the help of David—Fritz and Suzel “tie the knot”. As the perfect wedding gift, David returns the vineyard winnings to the couple. *Conductor* Warren Jones, *Director* Nic Muni.

Friday, July 24, 8 PM & Sunday, July 26, 2 PM

Cowell Theater at Fort Mason

\$40, \$25 (student)

***Così fan tutte* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

In another tale involving nuptials, Mozart and Da Ponte humorously illustrate that love and relationships are anything but clear-cut. Cynical Don Alfonso doesn't believe in fidelity and challenges his two young military friends, Guglielmo and Ferrando, to test their own fiancées, Dorabella and her sister Fiordiligi. The men accept the wager—and the condition that for twenty-four hours they will do exactly as Don Alfonso instructs. After a bevy of deceptions, shenanigans and disguises, Don Alfonso's point has been proven. Or has it?

Conductor Ari Pelto, *Director* Robin Guarino.

Friday, August 7, 8 PM & Sunday, August 9, 2 PM

Cowell Theater at Fort Mason

\$40, \$25 (student)

Merola Grand Finale

Be there for the culmination of the Merola summer, as the San Francisco Opera Orchestra and Maestro Antony Walker join the young artists in an evening of thrilling arias and captivating ensembles. This critically acclaimed concert is designed to showcase the progress the Merola artists made during the summer and to give audiences a sneak preview of these future opera headliners. After the concert, congratulate and bid farewell to the Merola artists at a festive post-concert reception (tickets to the reception sold separately). *Conductor* Antony Walker.

Saturday, August 22, 7:30 PM

War Memorial Opera House

\$45 Grand Tier & Orchestra Prime

\$35 Orchestra

\$25 Dress Circle

\$15 Students*

Reception Tickets \$40

A limited number of free tickets are available to the Grande Finale for those who send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the Box Office. An \$8 handling fee per order (2 tickets per order maximum) must be included. Please make check payable to Opera Box Office.

Editor's Note: THE MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM, a 501(c)(3) independent nonprofit organization (**Jayne Davis**, Chairman and **Patrick Wilken**, President) which operates in collaboration with San Francisco Opera Center (**Sheri Greenawald**, Director), and San Francisco Opera (**David Gockley**, General Director), 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 several 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, John Relyea and Patrick Summers.**

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