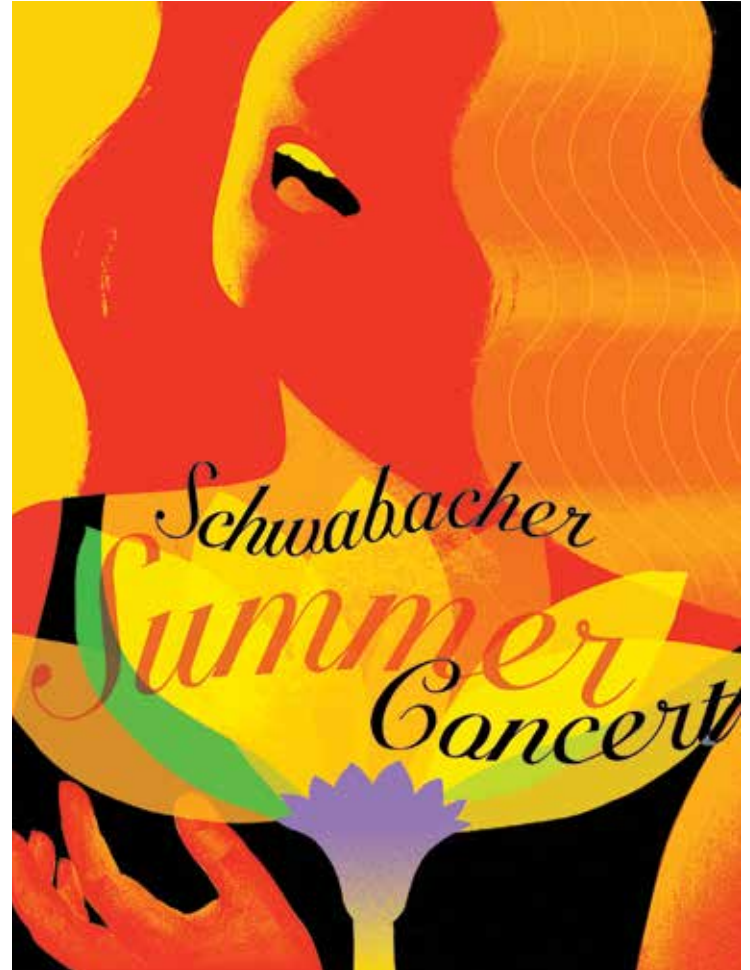




# MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM

## Summer 2019 Newsletter

**IN THIS ISSUE** From the Executive Director **2**  
Q & A with Jake Heggie **3** · 2019 Spring Benefit Gala **4**  
*If I Were You* Events **6** · In Memoriam **7**  
2019 Summer Festival **Back Cover**



## A Landmark Summer

"This summer will be a landmark one for Merola," says Sheri Greenawald, San Francisco Opera Center Director who serves as Merola's Artistic Director, as she looks ahead to the much-anticipated August world premiere of *If I Were You* by Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer. "This is a story that will capture people with its elements of the supernatural and its ongoing mystery. It's not exactly a *Who Dunit*, but it's close to that, and I've always wanted a murder mystery set to music!"

"This world premiere sets up a real challenge for the singers and musicians involved," Sheri says of the double-cast production. "There is no template to follow, so it must all flow from their own imaginations. Having done many world premieres myself, I know that this is exciting and fun! And it is my delight that the amazing Nicole Paiement, who is artistic director for Opera Parallèle, will conduct this premiere, with her expertise in the contemporary repertoire.

Keturah Stickann, an innovative director and choreographer with a history of working with Jake, will stage the production. We have a fabulous team."

But the world premiere is far from the only highlight of the 2019 Merola Summer Festival, which will kickoff in July with the Schwabacher Summer Concert. "We have a great Schwabacher Concert program for our audiences," Sheri says. "I always prefer when we have truly extended scenes to present, and this year, we are featuring only five operas in concert, including the entire first act of *La rondine*! This gives the artists featured in this concert the chance to develop the characters in a fuller way. And the concert also allows special talents to be cameo-ed, like our young bass who will tackle the role of Morosov in *Die schweigsame Frau*. This is such an interesting opera in that it features the two extremes of the vocal ranges...a 'teife bass' (low bass), and a high-flying coloratura soprano. I love this dichotomy!"

(continued...)

## A Landmark Summer (cont.)

The concert will offer audiences a glimpse into these two little-performed works, but it also features beloved 19th-century classics. “Our audiences will be in familiar territory as well, with powerful scenes from *Faust*, *Il trovatore*, and *Lucia di Lammermoor*,” Sheri says, “so there should be something for everyone in this concert. This will be under the baton of Craig Kier, a new face to the Merola family, and we are thrilled to have Jose Maria Condemi (Merola ’99/’00) return to direct.”

“We have another new conductor for the program this summer as well,” Sheri continues. “I’m very excited to have George Manahan conducting our Merola Grand Finale, and I’m sure, with the exciting talents we have coming for the program this summer, this concert will have the gems and thrills that Merola consistently produces on such evenings. George is Music Director for both Portland Opera and the American Composers Orchestra, and was music director for City Opera in New York for many years. I feel sure that Merola Apprentice Director Greg Eldridge will be a good match for Maestro Manahan when staging this spectacle. It is always a thrill for me and Mark Morash as we listen from Box E in the War Memorial, and we have been known to high-five one another during the concert! I expect no less this summer.”



## From the Executive Director



Merola 2019 is here! We are almost at the culmination of an exciting journey Merola embarked upon years ago. In August, *If I Were You*, Merola’s first-ever commission of an opera, will have its world premiere. We could not be more thrilled to see the 2019 Merolini put their stamp on the complex roles in this wonderful piece working with composer Jake Heggie, librettist Gene Scheer, conductor

Nicole Paiement, and director Keturah Stickann. Four of the lead singers will be in alternating casts, which will give more Merolini the opportunity to be a part of the creative process. I encourage you to enrich your Merola Summer Festival experience by seeing both casts.

Those of the 2019 Merolini not featured in *If I Were You* are working on a thrilling Schwabacher Summer Concert that will feature extended excerpts from *Faust*, *La rondine*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Il trovatore*, and *Die schweigsame Frau*, conducted by Craig Kier and directed by Merola alumnus Jose Maria Condemi (’99/’00). In these pages you’ll find Sheri’s insights into the rich and varied works that make up the summer festival season, from 19th century standards to rarely performed early-20th century works, to our own world premiere (pp. 1-2). Jake recently did a Q & A with us on the process of creating *If I Were You* that we are excited to share with you (p. 3). You’ll also find photos from a truly memorable Merola Benefit Gala in April that celebrated the upcoming world premiere of *If I Were You* and featured a brilliant concert by the 2019 Adler Fellows with a special appearance by Jake Heggie.

I can’t wait to share this groundbreaking summer with you.

See you at Merola!

Warmest wishes,  
Jean Kellogg



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## Q & A with *If I Were You* Composer, Jake Heggie



**How close is *If I Were You* to what you and Gene originally envisioned when you set out to work on it? How has it changed?**

It has evolved tremendously! From the start, we were both eager to explore a piece that would be infused with dark poetry, an element of magic realism, as well as humor and romance. That remained constant. But the way we tell the story changed quite a bit based on Gene’s inventive libretto and what we learned about the characters as I composed their music—when we discovered what is deeper in their hearts. While I was writing, several critical moments in Act Two emerged. I felt as though a particular character was telling me they wanted to make a big choice, one that wasn’t in the original libretto.

Oh, and originally the role of Brittomara (the devil) was going to be a high, coloratura soprano—think Queen of the Night! We reconsidered as we moved forward, and she wound up being a mezzo-soprano. (Just a little different!)

**What was most challenging about composing the opera?**

For Gene, I think it was having to invent so much because though the original novel has fascinating devices, it is not in any way a stage work. So he really had to create the world of the drama. For me, the challenge was not knowing who I was composing for! In the past, I’ve always been able to write with specific singers in mind. I mean, I always write the role, but usually know who will be the first interpreter—who I’m “dressing” the role on. So, I had to create a fantasy cast of professional singers in my head as I wrote. (And no, I won’t tell you who they are.)

**What are you most excited to share with audiences?**

I’m really excited by the surprises in this opera and the music it has inspired. It’s a whole new world for me creatively. There’s great range to the characters—each one has a motif that identifies them throughout the opera, and each one has their “moment.”

**Which character did you most enjoy composing for?**

Oh I love them all! Brittomara was probably the most fun because she’s always having fun: reinventing herself, observing people, messing them up, etc. But I loved following the journey of Fabian’s soul through all the different characters he inhabits. Diana emerged as a stunning, powerful character—much more so than I had originally thought. She surprised me again and again—and that was very moving.

**What was most musically challenging about the piece?**

The most challenging thing is always identifying the “sound world” of the piece—what makes it all “of a piece” and different from my other operas, so that it has its own harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic identity. Once that’s established, the characters can emerge organically with their own motifs and tunes. But first, that sound world has to be established. I don’t think you’d confuse an aria from this opera with an aria from *Dead Man Walking* or *Moby-Dick*. At least, that’s my hope.

**What musical or thematic connections does *If I Were You* have to your other operas? How is it different?**

People tell me that I have a sound or a style—but I’m not aware of it. I just write. I try to choose stories that challenge me anew and will push me into new territory so that I don’t just repeat myself. That said, constants in my work are high emotional stakes that lead to big, lyric singing. I like tunes, “ear worms,” and motifs that identify characters and situations. *If I Were You* is filled with them! Thematically, I am drawn to stories that deal with identity—the journey to accepting or rejecting one’s lot in life.

**What do you think you will discover about working with two different casts on the world premiere?**

I’m *thrilled* there will be two casts right away! We will learn so much about the roles—the characters—etc. That’s one of the most exciting parts of seeing a new work realized: learning from different performers’ perspectives. It will be so different based on their individual strengths, interpretations, and performances. That’s been fascinating with all the productions of my other operas, as well—all the different people who have sung the leads in *Dead Man Walking*, *Three Decembers*, *Moby-Dick*, *It’s A Wonderful Life*, etc.

**Is there a downside to writing for and working with young artists compared to established artists?**

Absolutely the opposite! *No downside at all!* I learn so much from young singers because they are always “*all in*” to try new ideas as we rehearse. Once they know they have permission to explore, and that I’m eager to learn from them, they will surprise themselves—and me—and we will all benefit from the experience.

# If I Were You

## A World Premiere Gala

Photos by Drew Altizer Photography

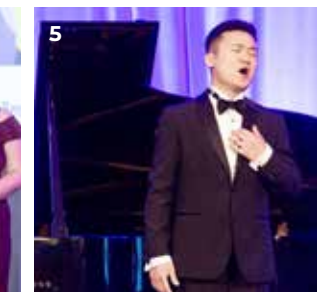
Saturday, April 13, 2019  
The Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco



### Jake Heggie Special Performance



### Adler Fellows Performance



**1** Ruth Uchimura, Beatrice Gomory, Ronny Michael Greenberg, Mary Sue Bizzarri, Christopher Wiseman, Maurice Bizzarri, Susan Walker, and Pamela George; **2** Ronny Michael Greenberg, Jennifer Neuherz, Eric Sleigh, and Elizabeth Castro Abrams; **3** Gwendolyn Evans and Hillary Power; **4** Jonathan Dant and Keith Cantrelle; **5** Cathie Johnson, Duane Phillips, and Amii Barnard-Bahn; **6** Auctioneer Liam Mayclem

**1** Marilyn Cabak, Michael Cabak, and Emely Weissman; **2** Jefferson Rice and Ina Chun; **3** Zach Beard, Victoria Weatherford, Rachel Bier Lem, Tessa Greenly, and Adam Arthur Bier; **4** Jean Kellogg, Jayne Davis, Patrick Wilken, Carlyn Clause, and Christopher Wiseman; **5** Freda Scott; **6** David Donati and Jennifer Jura

**1** James A. Noe III and Mary Sue Bizzarri; **2** Jackie and Allan Bertillion; **3** James Cross, Antonia Cross, Guy Cross, Charles Antonen, and Erika Nelson; **4** Dr. W. Conrad Sweeting and Daisy Newman; **5** Lida Richardson and Anjali Blacker; **6** Lucas Santos, Chinese Cultural Counsellor Zhai Deyu, Dennis Zhang, Chinese Consul General Wang Donghua, Liu Bin, Zhao Haiyan

**1** Ashley Dixon (Merola '15/'17) performs a selection from *If I Were You* accompanied by composer Jake Heggie; **2** Jake Heggie; **3** Jake Heggie and Ashley Dixon; **4** SeokJong Baek (Merola '18), Mary Evelyn Hangle (Merola '16), and Ashley Dixon; **5** Zhengyi Bai (Merola '18); **6** César Cañón (Merola '17), Kseniia Polstiankina Barrad (Merola '18), SeokJong Baek, Mary Evelyn Hangle, Ashley Dixon, Zhengyi Bai, Christopher Colmenero (Merola '18), and Christopher Oglesby (Merola '18)

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## Exciting Events Encompassing *If I Were You*

Join Merola for special forums, preview lectures, and symposia focused on *If I Were You* this summer throughout the Bay Area. All events are open to the public. For more information visit [merola.org/calendar](http://merola.org/calendar).

### *If I Were You* Preview Lectures

A 90-minute exploration of the music and development of *If I Were You*, led by librettist Gene Scheer and dramaturg Kip Cranna

#### San Francisco: Tuesday, July 16, 7:30 pm

USF Fromm Institute for Lifelong Learning, 660 Parker Ave., San Francisco, CA 94117  
Free. No RSVP needed.

#### East Bay: Saturday, July 20, 2:00 pm

Lafayette Library, 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette, CA 94549  
Free. No RSVP needed.

#### Palo Alto: Monday, July 22, 2:00 pm

Palo Alto Library, Rinconada Branch, Embarcadero Room, 1213 Newell Rd., Palo Alto, CA 94303  
Presented in partnership with the San Francisco Opera Guild, Peninsula Chapter  
Free. No RSVP needed.

#### Los Gatos: Monday, July 22, 7:30 pm

Addison-Penzak JCC, 14855 Oka Rd., Los Gatos, CA 95032.  
Presented in partnership with the San Jose Opera Guild.  
Admission: \$10. Free for Opera Guild and JCC members.

### Opera on the Couch

Opera on the Couch provides a forum where psychoanalytic insights deepen the meaning and experience of opera. Our discussion of *If I Were You* will occur promptly after the show on Sunday, August 4, when the immediate visceral experience of music, drama, and spectacle will enliven a fuller and deeper understanding of the emotional and psychological aspects of the work.

#### Sunday, August 4, 5:00 pm

Books Inc., 601 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94102  
Presented in partnership with the San Francisco Center for Psychoanalysis and Dr. David Stein

### San Francisco Opera Guild, East Bay Chapter Garden Party Potluck with special guests Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer

#### Sunday, July 21, 4:30 pm

The Home of Silvia and Larry Lin  
921 Kirkcrest Road, Alamo, CA 94507  
Renewing SFOG, EBC members: no charge  
Guests: \$10, which may be credited toward a new membership

## In Memoriam



### Charlotte Patricia Holt Beresford

Patricia (Pat) passed away peacefully in her sleep on March 25, 2019. Born in October 1927 in New Rochelle, New York, she was the oldest of three children.

Pat was a graduate of Pine Manor College, Class of 1948. After college Pat went on to start a career in publishing. That career included positions with (then) Rinehart & Company and Scribner and Sons, where Pat worked with Charles M. ("Sparky") Schultz to publish the early "Peanuts" books, with Ralph Nader on his early groundbreaking work as a consumer advocate, and with author Philip Wylie, among others.

Another lifelong passion of Pat's was opera, and upon moving to California, Pat became an integral part of the Merola Opera Program and the San Francisco Opera. Along with helping foster the careers of many up-and-coming opera singers and pianists, Pat also worked as a super at the opera and was fortunate to share the stage with many of the world's most celebrated singers, forming life-long friendships.

Shown with Merola alum (1996) and San Francisco Opera Head of Music Staff, John Churchwell.



### Susan Meadows Hone

Susan Meadows Hone, a longtime Merola supporter and former Board of Directors member, passed away on April 2, 2019.

Born in San Francisco and raised in Madera, California, Sue was a proud graduate of UC Berkeley and made Berkeley her home for more than fifty years. She was a dedicated public servant who served several terms on the Berkeley City Council, where she championed women's rights and worked hard to improve Berkeley's libraries, parks, and public transportation. Sue also served on the Bay Area Rapid Transit Board and as a California Probate Referee. She was a champion of other elected women, and an early president of the California Elected Women for Education and Research. Although not an attorney, Sue was a founder of California Women Lawyers Association. She also served as a board member of the McCullum Youth Court and the College Preparatory School. Her many interests led her to memberships in Berkeley's Town and Gown Club, the Claremont Book Club, the Berkeley Book Club, and the Berkeley Tennis Club.

Apart from politics and her family, Sue's greatest personal passion in life was music. She served on the boards of the Berkeley Symphony, Berkeley Opera, Berkeley Piano Club, and the Merola Opera Program as well as chairman of the board of San Francisco Classical Voice. She was also a member of New York's Metropolitan Opera Club.



### Dana Turkington Horner

Dana Turkington Horner peacefully passed away in her home on Friday, March 15. Dana was born, August 18, 1928, in San Francisco to Ed and Elaine Turkington. Dana grew up in San Francisco, attended Miss Burke's School for Girls, and graduated from Stanford University earning a BA in Education and a minor in Botany. While at Stanford, Dana lived at Roble Hall and Storey House and became a huge football fan. She was one of the original Stanford Dollies, cheering her team on to victory, and was a season ticket holder for years.

Dana was a fulltime home maker, raising three children. She modeled for Saks Fifth Ave and I. Magnin, volunteered with the Junior League, the San Francisco Symphony, Stanford Children's Hospital, and served as a board member of the Merola Opera Program.

Dana was an avid opera lover and lived life to the fullest. She traveled the world, played dominoes weekly with her best friends, and hosted numerous college students and boarders in her Atherton home.



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# MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM 2019 SUMMER FESTIVAL

WORLD PREMIERE

## *If I Were You*

A new opera in two acts by  
composer Jake Heggie and  
librettist Gene Scheer

August 1–6

## Schwabacher Summer Concert

July 11 & 13

## Merola Grand Finale

August 17

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