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Sheri Greenawald

A Tribute by Mark Morash

I truly don't know where to start with someone who has affected me so deeply professionally and personally, but as with most stories, I think the best place to start is the beginning. My first encounter with Sheri pre-dates our association with Merola and the San Francisco Opera Center by more than a decade. When I was starting out on the music staff at the Canadian Opera Company (COC), Sheri came to Toronto in 1990 to sing the role of Magda in Puccini's *La rondine*. She was different in so many ways. First of all, there was Sheri the performer. She was riveting from the moment she stepped into a rehearsal. She would sing into each and every phrase with a charisma and individual conviction that I had never seen and which to this day remains in short supply. One of the great messages of Sheri as a person but also Sheri as a mentor was "Be a good colleague. These are the people you will work with for the rest of your career." Sheri's ideas about being an artist reflect exactly what she wants out of humanity.

When Sheri was hired by Pamela Rosenberg to take over as Director of the San Francisco Opera Center in 2002, Pamela asked me to go to Seattle where Sheri was singing *Madama Butterfly* with Seattle Opera to meet up and talk through some of the details of various Opera Center programs prior to her actual start date. When we met over lunch the day after the performance, I reminded her that we had met before and regaled her with my recollection of us working together at COC. She of course remembered our previous encounter in detail—Not! Nevertheless, the lunch meeting was energetic, fun, full of stories, and full of ideas. We were off and running.

What I didn't know that day was that this was going to be the best boss and teammate a person could ever hope for. First off, she was like dynamite with the Opera Center artists. I mean a good kind of dynamite—the kind that implodes a building that has been around for a while in hopes of building something new and better. What I am about to tell you may surprise some of you, but Sheri is actually quite passionate about singing. Not just the history and culture of singing, but the actual act of phonation. Like "how does she do that/shut the door while I try this out/don't try this at home" kind of passion. That obsession along with her ability to dissect a musical phrase for its expressive possibility was an ongoing revelation to me. That same artist who I heard years ago sing with all her heart and mind was also a teacher of equal conviction.



Sheri was always learning and challenging her own vocal assumptions. We would talk a lot about singing—a topic that I am pretty dedicated to as well. We would talk singing and singers almost every day. There were many days that she would present an instructive concept to me that I had never contemplated and bam!, my ideas all had to go back to the drawing board. But amazingly, there were times I presented ideas, and she would listen intently. The payoff was when I would hear her impart that same idea to a young artist, sometimes honoring me with an attribution for the information and sometimes having so fully integrated the idea into her own understanding of singing that she was beyond still thinking about it.

Patience is not always Sheri's calling card. Take travel days for example. There was the time Sheri and I were traveling on a national auditions tour to Chicago along with our Opera Center colleague, Jo Ann McStravick. For those of you who have traveled through any airport ever, you know that boarding announcements may not always be crystal clear. We brought carry-ons on our short-haul trips and it was always fastest getting off the plane if you could nab the overhead bin space above your seat. The airline was not

Continued on page 2.



Photos left to right: Sheri Greenawald; Philippe Sly (Merola '11) and Sheri Greenawald; Mark Morash ('87), Jo Ann McStravick, Sheri Greenawald, and Chris Bragg; Jose Maria Condemni ('99/'00) and Sheri Greenawald. Photographs from Kristen Loken Photography and Mark Morash.

doing a top-notch job of sharing boarding information. More and more people seemed to be boarding and each person seemed to have an increasingly larger roller-bag. With frustration quickly coming to a boil, Sheri unexpectedly shouted in a well-honed fortissimo “what row are you boarding?”

The silence across the airport was deafening. Easily 800 people turned to find the origin of whatever kind of creature had just managed to hurl their voice forcefully enough to overpower the conversations of people at eight to ten surrounding boarding gates not to mention putting the public address system of one of the nation’s transportation hubs to shame. It was an instructive moment for me about Sheri’s “curiosity,” not to mention a lesson in physics as to how much sound one set of vocal cords can be expected to produce.

The national auditions tour as a whole was full of wonderful memories. Sheri knew what a cruel process auditioning was and was out to make it a kinder, more welcoming experience for every singer she met. If we didn’t manage to make a singer comfortable in each brief audition, our job was not successful. Sheri just loves people. She doesn’t even

realize how driven she is to connect with them. She can’t help it. She instinctively reaches out to people to let them know she sees a real person. Sheri would tell me sometimes that she considers herself a private person. If you think of self-sufficient or independent as private, I buy that, but private meaning doing best when left alone—difficult to swallow.

Sheri is the person everyone wants to be around. She loves a party and she comes by her credentials honestly as life of the party. It was always my honor to call Sheri my colleague and friend. She is informed, diverse, entertaining, ridiculously talented, tireless, responsible, spontaneous, and above all engaged—engaged in her work and engaged in the world. For eighteen years, I would reflect on how lucky I was to work every day with someone who was so generous, inspired, and wired so precisely for the job she was tasked to do, not to mention that I was working alongside someone who was so intent on making my work the best it could be. It’s difficult to say goodbye to those wonderful days working together, but it’s easy to say thank you for what has been a ride unlike anything I could ever have asked for. You are hands down the best, Sheri Greenawald! Thank you for being you!

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From the Executive Director



Dear friends,

I am *thrilled* we are welcoming a new group of Merolini for an in-person program this summer! It has taken a great deal of planning and creativity by the new artistic leadership team at the San Francisco Opera Center, Artistic Director Carrie-Ann Matheson and General Manager Markus Beam,

to make this happen. Merola's 2021 program will look a bit different from a typical year. The Merolini will be housed together in a "social bubble" and the program will be overseen by a Health and Safety Manager. Merola members will get to meet the young artists at a virtual Meet the Merolini on June 17. Members will also have access to five streamed master classes with a wonderful array of faculty.

In addition to intensive training and coaching, the Merolini will stretch their artistic wings in two innovative productions. *What the Heart Desires*, a recital of compositions by women and people of color, curated by mezzo-soprano Ronnita Miller (Merola '05) and tenor Nicholas Phan, will explore diversity in song. *Back Home: Through the Stage Door*, a digital project directed by the award-winning David Paul, will allow our young artists to hone their skills working on video, an increasingly important medium in the opera world. The program will conclude with the Merola Grand Finale, performed outdoors with piano this year. All productions will be available to stream online.

You'll find a calendar of our summer events in these pages (page 8). We also share photos from our first-ever virtual Benefit Gala in April (page 4) and an interview with Ronny Michael Greenberg (Merola '14) and Christian Pursell (Merola '17), whose company P&G Productions produced the memorable gala concert (page 5). At the gala, we honored the incomparable Sheri Greenawald, who recently retired as Director of the San Francisco Opera Center and Artistic Director of Merola. Mark Morash (Merola '87), who worked so closely with Sheri in her 18 years at the Opera Center and Merola, pays tribute to her on page 1. We also share memories of those we have lost in the past year (page 7). And we welcome a new staff member to the Merola family, Nancy Petrisko who joins us as our first ever Director of Advancement. You can read more about Nancy on page 3.

I look forward sharing this exciting summer with you—and hopefully seeing you in person before too much longer!

With all best wishes,

Jean Kellogg

Merola Welcomes Nancy Petrisko as Director of Advancement



Nancy Petrisko joined the Merola Opera Program team in the newly created role of Director of Advancement on June 1, 2021. She comes to Merola from the Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts, UC Davis, where she served as Director of Development. Nancy has held leadership positions in a wide variety of performing arts organizations and served as a consultant to numerous nonprofit arts organizations in addition to teaching courses at the university level related to arts management.

Nancy's 30-plus year professional career began at San Francisco Opera, where she served as Operations Manager, and has included extensive work with new and established opera companies and organizations dedicated to the vocal arts—Washington National Opera, Vocal Arts Society, Opera Lafayette, Washington Concert Opera, and Opera Parallèle.

Many of her years were dedicated to presenting organizations where she worked with a wide variety of artists in music (classical, jazz, world, and popular), dance (modern and classical), and theater. Her greatest pride as an independent consultant was working with young organizations to build resources, engage in successful planning to effect financial turnaround, and establish fundraising efforts for success.

"I have been a huge fan of the Merola Opera Program since my earliest days with San Francisco Opera at the beginning of my career," Nancy said. "I am honored to be a part of such a distinguished team and outstanding company. I welcome the chance to apply my skills for the long-term benefit of artists, audiences, and the future of opera."



MEROLA
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Un Gala in Maschera

Merola's Virtual Benefit, April 10



1 Mark Morash (Merola '87/ San Francisco Opera Center 1998-2020); **2** Carol Weitz and Betty Newman celebrated from the Newman home; **3** Ronny Michael Greenberg (Merola '14), pianist and co-producer of the Benefit Gala concert; Jean Kellogg, Merola Opera Program Executive Director; host/auctioneer Casey Candebat (Merola 12/'14); and Christopher Wiseman, Merola Vice President and Benefit Gala Chair, raised a glass following the live portion of the virtual Benefit Gala; **4** Pamela Rigg and Deborah Mathews enjoyed *Un Gala in Maschera*, Merola's first-ever virtual Benefit Gala, from Manzanillo, Mexico; **5** Behind-the-scenes at the recording of the Benefit Gala with Christopher Wiseman; **6** Tracy Grant, Merola's Director of Contributed Giving, and daughter Mélanie Grant (with Mélanie's special friend, Guena) donned masks to enjoy the event; **7** Marie Bertillion Collins and Elise Marie Collins sipped wine while celebrating at the virtual Benefit Gala; **8** Merola Executive Director Jean Kellogg donned a mask for the celebration; **9** Christopher Wiseman and Casey Candebat (Merola '12/'14) seen behind-the-scenes during *Un Gala in Maschera*; **10** Merola Board Chairman Patrick Wilken participated in honoring Sheri Greenawald.

Catching up with P&G Productions



The COVID-19 pandemic upended the world for most of us, but performing artists were particularly hard hit. With the lights dimmed in opera houses around the world, Merola alumni have launched a number of creative projects to keep themselves employed and practice their art. Pianist Ronny Michael Greenberg (Merola '14) and bass-baritone Christian Pursell (Merola '17) founded P&G Productions and produced a number of successful virtual events, including Merola's holiday recital, *A Very Merola Holiday*, and the acclaimed concert at Merola's virtual Benefit Gala, *Un Gala in Maschera*, in April. We recently chatted with Ronny and Christian about forming P&G Productions and the challenges and excitement of producing the Benefit Gala concert.



How did you start producing virtual events together and form P&G Productions?

We collaborated on our first virtual concert in May 2020 which was a big success and naturally led us to take on more similar projects throughout the year into 2021.

How do you divide up the work when you take on a virtual event?

Generally Ronny takes on the role of Artistic Director and Christian the role of Video Director. Much of the work overlaps in the creative process and we keep an open flow of communication for the best possible product.

What were the unique challenges of producing the Merola virtual Benefit Gala concert?

There were many challenges in producing the concert including managing the schedule, venue, and vendors of the entire production while following COVID protocols, being lighting designers, operating a heavy 12-foot jib crane, and all of the fine details of operation, audio/video equipment, and post-production. These challenges inspired and motivated us to do our best and deliver a breathtaking product.

What was the most unexpected thing that happened in the course of putting together the concert?

The most unexpected thing was that we ended up recording in Oakland and Cincinnati, which doubled the logistical challenges. We are very proud of having made that decision, because we had access to a beautiful Masonic Lodge at ARCO in Price Hill, Cincinnati, and ample time to record. This is thanks to Christian's connection and our combined entrepreneurial spirit! What's funny is that while we were deciding to make Cincinnati the main recording city, guess who was moving to Cincinnati... Sheri Greenawald! So we helped her with her move and to say "thank you," she recorded a song for us.

What did the virtual Benefit Gala enable you to do that wouldn't have been possible at an in-person event?

The virtual format enabled us to produce several high-quality recordings that will last forever. It's not as likely you'd achieve that with one take at an in-person event. Being able to then share that with all of our fans and audiences from around the world at any time is very valuable.

How do you think P&G Productions may evolve when in-person events return?

For in-person events, P&G envisions offering both live recording and live broadcasting for audiences who are not able to make it locally or who are out of town. This will help us to continue expanding audiences while capturing the event digitally for further promotion.

What virtual and in-person projects do you have coming up?

At the moment we are exploring ways in which we can continue producing content for organizations, artists, and for ourselves. We are both getting back to performing live as soloists which is a big relief. This project has given us strength and excitement as we return to live performance, and we are prepared to do it all!

Merola 2021 Summer Festival

All Master Classes will be available to stream for Merola members on the dates listed below. *What the Heart Desires* will be performed on July 3. A limited number of seats will be available to \$1,000+ Merola donors on a first-come, first-served basis. The recital will be filmed and available to view online for members on July 16 and the general public on July 30. The Merola Grand Finale will be performed live on July 31. There may also be an invited audience for the live performance, depending on the COVID restrictions. It will be filmed and available to stream on-demand for members on August 20 and the general public on September 3.

MEMBER EVENTS

Viewing options to be announced. Full details at merola.org/calendar.

JUNE

Meet the Merolini

Thursday, June 17, 7:00 PM PDT

Get to know the 2021 Merola artists and see what they've been up to this past year. Hosted by San Francisco Opera Center's Carrie-Ann Matheson (Artistic Director) and Markus Beam (General Manager).

Master Class with Warren Jones

Wednesday, June 30, 5:00 PM PDT

Always a Merola audience favorite, Mr. Jones has been a guest artist at Lincoln Center's "Great Performers Series," as well as the Tanglewood, Ravinia, and Caramoor festivals, in addition to touring as a recitalist throughout Europe and Asia. For 10 years he was Assistant Conductor at The Metropolitan Opera and for three seasons served in the same capacity at San Francisco Opera.

JULY

What the Heart Desires

Performance: July 3

Available to Members: July 16

Public Release Date: July 30

Ronnita Miller (Merola '05), co-curator
Nicholas Phan, co-curator

Celebrating diversity in song, this recital co-curated by mezzo-soprano Ronnita Miller (Merola '05) and tenor Nicholas Phan will explore the many things our hearts desire. Featuring compositions by women and people of color, the program will include selections about romantic desire, physical desire, and the longing for home, for rest, for peace, and for a better world performed by select 2021 Merola young artists.

Master Class with Denyce Graves

Wednesday, July 7, 5:00 PM PDT

Recognized worldwide as one of today's most exciting vocal stars, Denyce Graves continues to gather unparalleled popular and critical acclaim in performances on four continents. *USA Today* identifies her as "an operatic superstar of the 21st Century," and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* exclaims, "if the human voice has the power to move you, you will be touched by Denyce Graves."

Master Class with Howard Watkins

Wednesday, July 14, 5:00 PM PDT

American pianist Howard Watkins is a frequent associate of some of the world's leading musicians on the concert stage; he's also an assistant conductor at The Metropolitan Opera. His appearances throughout the Americas, Europe, Asia, Russia, and Israel have included collaborations with the biggest names in opera.

Master Class with Carrie-Ann Matheson

Wednesday, July 21, 5:00 PM PDT

Carrie-Ann Matheson (San Francisco Opera Center Artistic Director) has a multi-faceted international career as pianist, conductor, and educator. She has worked at prestigious opera houses and festivals around the world, including the Metropolitan Opera, Opernhaus Zurich and the Salzburg Festival, and regularly appears on the recital stage with the world's greatest opera stars.

Master Class with Martin Katz

Wednesday, July 28, 5:00 PM PDT

Martin Katz has been dubbed "the gold standard of accompanists" by *The New York Times*. His 50-year career has taken him to five continents, collaborating with the world's most-celebrated singers in recital and recording.

Back Home: Through the Stage Door

Available to Members: August 13

Public Release Date: August 27

Back Home: Through the Stage Door, conceived and directed for film by award-winning director David Paul, showcases the 2021 Merola artists in an exciting digital format. This innovative work will highlight the program's imaginative approach to adapting to the digital demands of the opera world today. Paul's work has been praised by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* for its energy, humor, and emotional depth, and has been seen across four continents in five languages.

Merola Grand Finale

Performance: Saturday, July 31

Available to Members: Friday, August 20

Release Date: Friday, September 3

The Summer Festival concludes with the Merola Grand Finale, a concert featuring all the artists of the 2021 Merola Opera Program in a dazzling array of opera's most exciting arias and ensembles. Directed by 2021 Merola Stage Director Audrey Chait and accompanied by the Merola Pianists/Coaches, this performance showcases the hard work and extraordinary talent of the Merola artists.

In Memoriam



Ann Getty

Ann Getty, an international arts patron, acclaimed interior designer, and former publisher, died September 14, 2020 at her San Francisco residence.

Born March 11, 1941 in Gustine, CA (Merced County), Ann Gilbert Getty was later raised on a peach-and-walnut farm built by her European immigrant parents in Wheatland, CA. Growing up alongside her brothers, Ann nimbly drove a tractor and worked the fields during harvest. Her love of the land fueled her dreams of becoming a scientist or explorer and inspired her studies at U.C. Berkeley in the fields of anthropology and biology.

That knowledge later served Ann well as she participated in archeological digs with the Leakey Foundation for U.C. Berkeley anthropologist Tim White, digging in the dirt of Ethiopia's Great Rift Valley on the hunt for million-year-old fossils.

During college Ann worked a part-time job at the cosmetics counter of Joseph Magnin, a Union Square emporium in San Francisco. There she met Donna Long, who invited Ann to meet her brother and his friends at La Rocca's Corner, a classic North Beach bar, where Ann was introduced to her future husband: composer-philanthropist Gordon Getty. In 1964 the couple eloped to Las Vegas and married on Christmas Day.

Ann Getty led a storied, yet surprisingly modest, life while raising her four boys in a Willis Polk-designed, Pacific Heights mansion. In spite of attending decades of glamorous fêtes and opening-night soirées to support the San Francisco Symphony or the San Francisco Opera, Ann remained a somewhat shy, humble and industrious farm girl. Ann was a stalwart San Franciscan, who treasured time with her extended family. Her eldest son, Peter Getty, fondly described his mother as, "unfailingly frank, unpretentious, generous, and devoted."



Robert C. Greene

Robert Carl Greene was a very independent and focused individual who went at all things in his life with thoughtfulness and passion. He was born on August 14, 1932 in Bridgeport, Connecticut, graduated from Cornell University in 1955, and married his wife Edith the same year. Their honeymoon

was a canoe trip through the Adirondacks. After receiving a PhD in Geology from Harvard University in 1964, Bob went on to work for the U.S. Geological Survey, based first in Kentucky and then in California. He completed and published numerous geologic maps and associated research papers, including quadrangles in New Hampshire, Kentucky, Oregon, Nevada, and Death Valley, California.

Bob spent seven years (1977-1984) on a USGS project based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Along with geologic research and mapping, Bob and his family made extensive camping trips

into the desert to explore the mountains and ancient sites, and the coral reefs of the Red Sea. From Saudi Arabia, Bob and Edith took independent trips to numerous countries, visiting all seven continents, including Antarctica, and traveling north of the Arctic Circle.

Bob loved hiking and exploring the parks and beaches of California. He enjoyed woodworking, and planting and nurturing native plants on the hillside behind his home. Bob was a passionate lover of opera, supporting the Merola Opera Program because training and supporting young opera singers was important to him.



Suzanne Turley

Suzanne Turley died on October 30, 2020 in her Dolores Heights home, at age 81. Turley was born in Oakland's Peralta Hospital on June 12, 1939. Her father was Thomas Francis Turley Jr., her mother Constance Eleanor Turley. She grew up in Kensington, went to Anna Head School for Girls, and attended U.C. Berkeley, where

she studied Art History. She worked in a variety of positions, including briefly for San Francisco Opera, and volunteered for many organizations, including the San Francisco Symphony. Turley's husband, Bill Jackson, died in 2007.

Turley's passion and enthusiasm for opera was legendary. Her love of opera was born at a Stern Grove Festival performance. Her parents took her to a Pacific Opera performance of *Rigoletto* in 1950, which she remembered fondly.

Suzanne spent her time supporting many generations of Merolini, Adler Fellows, and other young artists. She sponsored and hosted many in her home. To these generations of artists and to music lovers she was a mentor, a counselor, and a great friend.



Buddy

Buddy found his way into the heart and home of Merola Opera Program Executive Director Jean Kellogg when he was adopted at the age of 5 from Dachshund Rescue of Virginia in 2008. Before that, he had been abandoned twice! Buddy happily traveled out to San Francisco with Jean in 2011 where he soon became

the SpokesDog for Merola. He would often come to work in the office, assisting the staff with eating their lunch and providing licks and wags. Buddy greatly enjoyed having Merola alums dog sit for him while his human parents traveled internationally. He LOVED it when Merolini sang to him while he sat on the top of the couch next to the piano, as he was an avid opera fan (and very discerning!). Buddy brought joy and love to many during his life, particularly Jean and her husband Henry (who Buddy strongly encouraged her to marry). He crossed over the rainbow bridge on March 29, 2021, but the sweet memories will last forever.



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2021 Merola Summer Festival

What the Heart Desires

Celebrating diversity in song, Ronnita Miller (Merola '05) and Nicholas Phan curate a program of songs composed by women and people of color performed by select 2021 Merola young artists.

Performance: **July 3**

Available to Members: **July 16**

Release Date: **July 30**

Back Home: Through the Stage Door

Experience the 2021 Merola young artists in an exciting and innovative digital format, conceived and directed for film by award-winning director David Paul.

Available to Members: **August 13**

Release Date: **August 27**

Merola Grand Finale

Cap off the Summer Festival with a concert featuring the 2021 Merola young artists in a dazzling array of opera's most memorable moments.

Performance: **July 31**

Available to Members: **August 20**

Release Date: **September 3**

Full details: merola.org