

**MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM SUPPORTERS
RAISE FUNDS AT FIRST-EVER VIRTUAL BENEFIT GALA**

UN GALA IN MASCHERA

FESTIVE CELEBRATION BRINGS IN OVER \$275,000

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (12 April 2021) – Opera lovers from around the world tuned in to **Merola Opera Program’s** stunning virtual benefit gala, ***Un Gala in Maschera***, on April 10. Hosted by Casey Candebat (Merola ‘12/’14), this musical evening honored departing Merola Artistic Director Sheri Greenawald (2002-2020), lauded as a brilliant lyric soprano and one of the leading women in opera, who has helped mold the lives and careers of more than 500 young artists. Highlighting the evening was an appearance by soprano Leah Crocetto (Merola ‘08) performing selections from Puccini’s *Tosca*, Menotti’s *The Old Man and the Thief*, Verdi’s *Ernani*, and Kern’s *Very Warm for May*. ***Un Gala in Maschera*** kicked off with enlightening interviews with past participants, and continued with performances that showcased illustrious Merolini including soprano Amber R. Monroe (Merola ‘19), mezzo-soprano Ashley Dixon (Merola ‘15/’17), baritones Joo Won Kang (Merola ‘11) and Efraín Solís (Merola ‘13), bass-baritone Christian Pursell (Merola ‘17), and pianist Ronny Michael Greenberg (Merola ‘14). Throughout the evening, attendees made donations to *Un Gala in Maschera’s* Fund a Need, benefitting two of Greenawald’s passions: the Sheri Greenawald Endowment Fund which creates a permanent legacy that will provide support for Merola’s distinguished faculty in perpetuity, and the Sheri Greenawald Artists Support Fund which directly supports living stipends for the young artists in the 2021 Merola summer training program. ***Un Gala in Maschera*** brought in over \$275,000 to support Merola’s artistic and educational programming efforts and ongoing mission as one of the foremost opera training programs for aspiring singers, coach accompanists, and stage directors.

Among the notable guests enjoying the festivities were Merola Executive Director **Jean Kellogg**, Merola President **Barbara Bruser Clark**, Chairman of the Merola Board of Directors **Patrick Wilken**, former Director of Musical Studies for SF Opera Center and Merola Opera Program **Mark Morash**

(Merola '87), and members of the ***Un Gala in Maschera Committee***, including Gala Chair **Christopher Wiseman**.

Merola Opera Program is widely regarded as the foremost opera training program for aspiring singers, coach accompanists, and stage directors. Merola nurtures the opera stars of tomorrow with master classes and private coaching with opera's most accomplished singers, conductors, and directors. Participants also receive training in operatic repertoire, languages, diction, acting, stage movement, and professional development. Offered free of charge for all participants, the Merola Opera Program is unique in the industry in many ways. It is the only young artist program to provide financial support to developing artists for five years following their participation, offering aid for essential career development expenses including coaching, language classes, and audition travel. In summer 2020, the company initiated the [Merola Artists Emergency Fund](#) to offer much-needed financial assistance to those artists who have lost wages and incurred unreimbursed expenses as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available here:
<http://cbpr.co/press/galainmaschera>