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Merola Artists Emergency Fund

**Providing Much-Needed
Assistance to Merola Alums
During the COVID-19 Pandemic**



Photos left to right: **Mary Evelyn Hangley** ('16) at the Schwabacher Summer Concert. **Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen** ('16) at the Schwabacher Summer Concert. **Toni Marie Palmertree** ('15) at the Schwabacher Summer Concert. Photography by Kristen Loken.

In April, Merola launched the Merola Artists Emergency Fund to help alumni who have suffered financial hardships brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Available to Merola participants from the past five years (2015-2019), the fund is intended to assist these young opera singers, coach accompanists, conductors, and directors who are in the early stages of establishing their careers and have suffered significant financial losses due to canceled performance contracts. Merola felt that it was imperative to step up and offer financial assistance and support for our alumni who are in the critical early stages of establishing their careers. To date, more than \$138,000 has been distributed to Merola alumni through the fund.

Board President Barbara Bruser Clark and Board Chairman Patrick Wilken said, "So many of our talented Merola participants have suddenly seen engagements evaporate. They are in such a crucial period of launching their careers in opera houses around the world, and it is our goal to help them remain on course and fulfill their immense potential."

Merola already provides continuing support to its alumni for career development, making Merola Career Grants available for five years following an artist's participation in the program to support everything from audition travel to headshots to vocal coaching, helping the young artists ease their transition to the professional opera world.

In response to the Merola Board's decision to support this initiative, Merola Artistic Director and San Francisco Opera Center Director Sheri Greenawald said, "This will be an extraordinarily valuable resource for Merolini struggling under the weight of many cancellations. It is an amazing, altruistic act by our board and the many supporters who are stepping up to contribute. On behalf of artists everywhere, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

Several artists, who have lost contracts and scheduled appearances to sing at concert halls from The Met to Chateau de Versailles, responded with words of praise, including soprano Toni Marie Palmertree (Merola '15) who replied, "I cannot help but write back immediately to express my gratitude. To everyone involved, thank you for thinking of us and supporting us in at a time that Merola will also feel some loss." Countertenor Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen (Merola '16) added, "The fund will make such a huge difference in my life, and in the lives of all recent Merolini." Soprano Mary Evelyn Hangley (Merola '16) noted, "Since completing the program, Merola has been the most supportive organization at every turn of my career."

To donate and for more information on the Merola Artists Emergency Fund visit merola.org/emergency-fund.





#MeroliniMixer

As a message of thanks for the support provided by **Merola Artists Emergency Fund** and all that Merola does for young artists, a group of alumni led by Esther Tonea ('19), César Cañón ('17), Cara Collins ('19), Elisa Sunshine ('19), and Rafael Porto ('19) created the **#MeroliniMixer**. Here's what they had to say:

*"The **Merola Opera Program** has changed many artists' lives in more ways than we can count, and we as Merolini want to give back. The hope behind Merolini Mixer is two-fold: to continue to practice the craft we so dearly love and to express our sincere gratitude for the Merola Artists Emergency Fund—which has allowed so many artists to find a source of stability in these otherwise uncertain times."*

These alumni took the lead to create and bring forth performances, produced, and edited to share with the Merola community via social media using the hashtag **#MeroliniMixer**. **Find all videos on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (@merolaopera)**. You can also view on [YouTube.com/merolaoperaprogram](https://www.youtube.com/merolaoperaprogram) or merola.org/media.

Videos created and shared to date include:

"Libiamo" from Verdi's *La traviata* featuring Amina Edris ('15) as Violetta and Pene Pati ('13) as Alfredo, with Cesar Cañón ('17) conducting and Nicholas Roehler ('19) on piano. The chorus featured twenty additional Merola alums: Andres Acosta ('17), Salvatore Atti ('19), Brennan Blankenship ('19), Jeff Byrnes ('19), Cree Carrico ('15), Cara Collins ('19), Ashley Dixon ('15/'17), Stefan Egerstrom ('19), Chelsey Geeting ('16), Nicholas Huff ('19), Anne-Marie MacIntosh ('19), Amber R. Monroe ('19), Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen ('16), Rafael Porto ('19), Brandon Scott Russell ('19), Elisa Sunshine ('19), Esther Tonea ('19), Kelsea Webb ('17), David Weigel ('13/'17), and Nicole Woodard ('15).

"Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante" from Bizet's *Carmen* performed by Esther Tonea ('19) and William Woodard ('19).

"Un'aura amorosa" from Mozart's *Così fan tutte* performed by Nicholas Huff ('19).

"People Will Say We're In Love" from *Oklahoma!* by Rodgers and Hammerstein performed by Madison Leonard ('15).

"Nuit d'hyménée" from Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* performed by Christopher Bozeka ('15) and Teresa Castillo ('16).



From the Executive Director



Dear friends,

For the first time in more than six decades, we will be starting the summer without welcoming 29 young artists to San Francisco. Although it is heartbreaking not to have the usual Merola summer, we are excited about the virtual enrichment we have

planned throughout the month of July, which will prepare the young artists for our full program in 2021. All of the artists who had been chosen for our 2020 program have been invited back in 2021.

The young artists will have four weeks of in-depth acting and language classes, as well as mentoring with Alan Darling, Martin Katz, and Kevin Murphy. We hope you will join us for a virtual Meet the Young Artists and four “master chats” during which industry leaders will share their insights with the young artists. These chats will feature Susan Graham, renowned mezzo-soprano and Merola alumna; Francesca Zambello, Director of Glimmerglass and Washington National Opera; David Garrison, Tony-nominated actor and director who will direct *Postcard from Morocco* in 2021; and Eun Sun Kim, Caroline H. Hume Music Director Designate of San Francisco Opera, and Gregory Henkel, SFO’s Managing Director: Artistic.

Next fall, we will have a virtual version of our canceled off-season event that was to have occurred this past March. Sheri Greenawald, Mark Morash, and Kip Cranna will offer their insights into *Postcard from Morocco* and *Le nozze di Figaro*, which we will now present in 2021.

The virtual events this summer and fall will give all of us a chance to connect with the young artists in anticipation of meeting them in person in 2021. The artists will get to know each other and some of the faculty during this virtual learning and will already have begun to bond before they arrive in San Francisco next summer. Challenging as this time is, we know Merola and our young artists will emerge even stronger when our full program can resume.

I look forward to seeing you virtually—and in person when the Merola family can safely gather together again.

With all best wishes,

Jean Kellogg

In Memoriam: Rockford Douglas Norby



Longtime Merola supporter Rockford Douglas (“Doug”) Norby died unexpectedly of natural causes at his Sonoma home on April 13, 2020. Doug was born on June 28, 1935, in Silver City, New Mexico, grew up in Grass Valley, CA, and lived most of his life in San Francisco, Marin County, and the Bay Area. After graduating from

Harvard with high honors, he went on to earn his MBA as a Harvard Business School Baker Scholar. Doug’s ingenuity and creativity in business led to a long and diverse career, in New York (McKinsey & Co.) and in the Bay Area, where he had leadership roles at Fairchild, LSI Logic, Syntex, Lucasfilm Ltd., Tessera, and more.

After retirement, he brought his expertise to the boards of international technology and pharmaceutical companies in Singapore, Tokyo, and Seoul, as well as domestic companies Alexion and Krystal Biotech. In addition to his many business activities, Doug was an enthusiastic lifelong learner in such varied areas as archeology, art, music, medicine and health, cosmology, and quantum physics. He took pleasure in outdoor activities with his friends and family, creating cherished memories of their adventures together.

Doug is survived by Susan, his spouse of more than 30 years; three wonderful children; and five grandchildren. Everyone who knew him will remember his dapper style, sense of humor, intelligence, curiosity, kindness, thoughtfulness, philanthropy, and above all, despite his many accomplishments, his humility. He was an accomplished partner and a citizen of the world, and will be deeply missed.



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Merola Artists Emergency Fund



1 Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen ('16) and Teresa Castillo ('16) at the 2016 Merola Grand Finale; **2** Isaac Frishman ('16) and Adelaide Boedecker ('16) perform at the 2016 Merola Grand Finale; **3** Ashley Dixon ('15/'17) with Daniel Noyola ('17) in *The Bear* (2017); **4** Tuomas Juutilainen ('17) with Martin Katz during a public master class in 2017; **5** Nicholas Huff ('19) and Brennan Blankenship ('19) in the world premiere of Jake Heggie's *If I Were You* (2019); **6** Natalie Image ('17) with Daniel Noyola ('17), David Weigel ('13/'17), and Dimitri Katotakis ('17) at the 2017 Merola Grand Finale; **7** Teresa Castillo ('16) with Boris Van Druff ('16), Brian Michael Moore ('16/'18), Andrew G. Manea ('16), and Matthew Anchel ('16) in *Transformations* (2016); **8** Nicholas Roehler ('19) with Warren Jones during a public master class in 2019.

Photography by Kristen Loken and Frank Wing.

What Merola Alums are Saying About the Merola Artists Emergency Fund

"I am so appreciative for what Merola has done for me and all the other Merola artists. Thank you for providing us with some hope and light in these dark times. I am missing my San Francisco family so much these days. What a wonderful organization and group I get to be a part of. I will be forever grateful."

– Ashley Dixon ('15/'17)

"I was truly looking at a bleak situation and with the future so uncertain, this literally changed everything. It allowed me to survive a little while longer while I wait out what appears to be a never-ending storm of cancellations. And knowing that no matter how far away I am, you all have my back means the world to me."

– Isaac Frishman ('16)

"What Merola is doing is so incredibly kind during this tough time for all. Merola's continued support of its artists is astounding; you are like a big family and I am so blessed to be a part of it."

– Natalie Image ('17)

"Your support means the world to me and I could not be more proud to call Merola my family. The financial support is certainly meaningful and can undoubtedly make differences in young artists' lives, but what is even more meaningful is knowing we have a support system such as Merola."

– Nicholas Roehler ('19)

"Thank you to everyone at Merola for their generous support. I honestly wasn't expecting this much support and I truly appreciate the help. Thank you for everything you do for us!"

– Teresa Castillo ('16)

"I am impressed again and again with how thoughtful, generous, and nurturing the program is to its people! This support will go a very long way to helping me through this crisis and I'm sure many others too. It wasn't something you had to do and it makes an incredible difference."

– Nicholas Huff ('19)

"Merola has helped me so much since the beginning and even during these crazy times you find a way to help. I'm speechless."

– Tuomas Juutilainen ('17)

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Summer Online Member Events

Members will be contacted by Merola with instructions and links to view online events.

Meet the Young Artists

This is your first chance to meet and get to know the 2020 young artists. The artists will be interviewed by Merola Artistic Director Sheri Greenawald and moderated by Merola Executive Director Jean Kellogg with a Q&A from the audience following. This is a great opportunity to learn some interesting facts and tidbits about the artists selected for this summer's program.

Friday, July 10, 4:00 PM

Master Chats with Luminaries from the Performing Arts World

Merola presents a series of four interviews with five different luminaries broadcast live on YouTube. Go behind the scenes as experts from the performing arts world share their insights and experience with the next generation of artists.



Susan Graham

Interview with world-renowned American mezzo-soprano Susan Graham (Merola '87).

Wednesday, July 8, 4:00–5:30 PM



Francesca Zambello

Interview with internationally recognized director of opera and theater Francesca Zambello. She is the General Director of The Glimmerglass Festival and the Artistic Director of The Washington National Opera at the Kennedy Center.

Thursday, July 16, 4:00–5:30 PM



David Garrison

Interview with David Garrison, the Tony-nominated actor and director. Garrison will direct Merola's 2021 production of *Postcard from Morocco*.

Thursday, July 23, 4:00–5:30 PM



Eun Sun Kim & Greg Henkel

Interview with Eun Sun Kim, Caroline H. Hume Music Director Designate of San Francisco Opera, and Gregory Henkel, SFO's Managing Director: Artistic.

Thursday, July 30, 4:00–6:00 PM



2021 Preview: From Mozart to the Surreal

Get a special behind-the-scenes preview of Merola's 2021 summer productions, Mozart's sublime classic *Le nozze di Figaro* and Dominick Argento's surreal 20th-century gem *Postcard from Morocco*, with Sheri Greenawald, Mark Morash, and dramaturg Kip Cranna. Learn more about these two exciting works, both cutting edge for their time.

Fall 2020, to be announced

Meet the 2020 Young Artists



Gabrielle Barkidjija
MEZZO-SOPRANO
River Forest, IL



Gabrielle Beteag
MEZZO-SOPRANO
Atlanta, GA



Emily Blair
SOPRANO
Hoffman Estates, IL



Ben Brady
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Cheong-ju, South Korea



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New York, NY



Philippe L'Esperance
TENOR
Grafton, MA



Yang Lin
APPRENTICE COACH
Shanghai, China



Thomas Lynch
BARITONE
Lynbrook, NY



Jesse Mashburn
MEZZO-SOPRANO
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BARITONE
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SOPRANO
Norton, MA



Mikayla Sager
SOPRANO
Vancouver, BC, Canada



Isabel Signoret
MEZZO-SOPRANO
Miami, FL



Anna Smigelskaya
APPRENTICE COACH
Saint Petersburg, Russia



Shiyu Tan
APPRENTICE COACH
Changsha, Hunan, China



Johanna Will
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Dresden, Germany



Marika Yasuda
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MEROLA ARTISTS EMERGENCY FUND

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