



## NEWSLETTER

ARGO GHERARDI, EDITOR

FEBRUARY 2012

### San José State University and San José Opera Guild Vocal Competition

On Sunday, February 26, the biennial vocal competition sponsored by the San José Opera Guild will take place at 1:00 PM in the Music Building Concert Hall of San José State University.

The competition is open to all full time students at a university or junior college who are serious about pursuing a career in opera. Each contestant must present three opera arias in contrasting styles and languages. One of the arias must be in English. Pianist Hadley McCarroll will accompany the contestants.

The San José Opera Guild will award \$700 to the first place winner and \$300 to the second place winner.

Mezzo-soprano Layna Chianakas, an assistant professor of voice at SJSU, is once again the coordinator for the competition. In the past, the contestants have

been voice students from SJSU, Santa Clara University, Stanford and West Valley College. Ms Chianakas expects that also this year we will have students from these schools enter the competition.

Immediately following the competition, the San José Opera Guild board of directors will host a reception in Room 161 of the Music Building. This will give the audience a chance to meet and talk with the contestants while the judges are making their decision.

Admission to the competition and reception is free, but, if you plan to park on campus, you will have to pay a \$5 parking fee.

Be sure to mark 1:00 PM, Sunday, February 26 on your calendar and then come to enjoy and support these young performers.

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### What Is Merola ?

by Susan English

One of the most important recipients of our San José Opera Guild's donations is the Merola Opera Program. However, numerous members are not as familiar with this program as was the case when Merola presented operas at Villa Montalvo many years ago.

Merola was created more than fifty years ago, by the San Francisco Opera's General Director, Kurt Herbert Adler. He named the training program for aspiring opera professionals after his predecessor, Gaetano Merola, as a living memorial. Since then, the Program has blossomed into an internationally respected model for building careers in opera.

Merola provides a balance of training, performances, and individualized support. It has grown to a twelve week program which fosters and challenges twenty-three singers, five apprentice coaches, and one ap-

prentice stage director. These participants, known as Merolini, are selected from hundreds of hopefuls from around the world.

Working in close collaboration with the San Francisco Opera and Opera Center, Merola is financially independent – making donations essential to meeting their continued goals. These goals include training in musical style and interpretation, role preparation, movement and acting, accompaniment and conducting, languages and diction, and breath work.

Meeting these goals is accomplished through a variety of activities. Master classes are taught by illustrious singers, directors, conductors, and coaches. In the past there have been many remarkable master teachers including: Regine Crespin, Jane Eaglen, Lotfi Man-

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souri, Leontyne Price, Donald Runnicles, Dame Joan Sutherland, and Merola alumni such as Carol Vaness, and Dolora Zajick.

In addition to these master classes and mentors, performance opportunities are provided for the Merolini. Fully staged operas with orchestra, a scenes concert, and the annual Merola Grand Finale showcase the talents of the participants. These experiences in front of a live audience put in to practice the depth and richness of the lessons learned. These performances are offered to donors to Merola, and some may be attended by the general public. Attending them gives the audience a chance to see the opera stars of the future at the early stages of their careers.

The success of the program shows in the brilliant careers Merola has helped launch. Some of the alumni include: Joyce DiDonato, Susan Graham, Jill Grove, Nancy Gustafson, Mark Delevan, Laura Claycomb, Brian Asawa, Anna Netrebko, Ann Panagulias, Ruth Ann Swenson, Deborah Voight, Patricia Racette, and Patrick Summers.

On Thursday, February 16, 2012, at 6:30 pm Merola is presenting a "Behind the Scenes" member event in San Francisco. If you would like to attend, please contact Susan English at [suenglish@yahoo.com](mailto:suenglish@yahoo.com) or 408-395-1308. This is just one performance of many that Merola will provide in 2012. A description of the event is on the Merola website: <http://merola.org/>. It will be an evening that allows the audience to see how pianists prepare singers for their roles and continue their musical involvement during the run of an opera production. David Hanlon and Robert Molicone will join in to talk about their musical backgrounds and their journeys through Merola to their current Adler Fellow coaching positions. At the end of the evening, mezzo-soprano Laura Krumm and baritone Ao Li will perform in a demonstration led by the pianists.

Additional events planned for this year for the Merola season: fully staged performances of Dominick Argento's *Postcard From Morocco* (July 19 and 21), and Mozart's *La Finta Giardiniera* (August 2 and 4), both in the Cowell Theatre. Also scheduled are the annual Schwabacher Summer Concert in Herbst Theatre (July 5) and a free performance in Yerba Buena Gardens (July 7). In addition, the traditional Merola Grand Finale will be staged on the War Memorial Opera House on August 18. ###

## Opera Travelers

Two outstanding contemporary American works beckon intrepid opera goers during February

By Mort Levine

When we learned that San Diego Opera's imaginative company was going to perform Jake Heggie's *Moby Dick*, we quickly climbed aboard to get some tickets. It will run from Feb 18 through Feb. 26. Just recently, we discovered that the same opera will also be part of next season's San Francisco season. That may be the reward for the impulsive opera traveler, but we don't have any regrets and we don't have to defer gratification.

We have been intrigued by the Heggie collaboration with librettist Gene Scheer ever since it opened in Dallas at the Winspear Opera House to a blaze of critical glory. At its opening, the audience broke into sustained applause and a shower of shredded programs fluttering down from the highest levels.

The west coast premiere next month will bring together some of the same team as in Dallas. Of special interest is the lone female role portraying the cabin boy Pip, sung and acted by the talented former Opera San José resident artist Talise Travigne. A critic described her work at first as "boyish and puckish and later haunting in madness." In the innovative staging, she is lost at sea, suspended high above the stage futilely paddling against the daunting waves.

*Moby Dick*, the powerful novel by Herman Melville, is a massive challenge for the librettist in terms of condensation while retaining the moral tone and the sweeping language. It is equally a challenge for the composer who comes through as he did with *Dead Man Walking* with accessible vocal music and vivid orchestral work.

The three hour opus features the outstanding tenor Jay Hunter Morris as Captain Ahab, the lethally obsessed pursuer of the legendary white whale. Morris sang an impressive Siegfried in the Met's *Ring Cycle* earlier this year.

Baritone Morgan Smith sings Starbuck and Jonathan Lemalu is a suitably coiffed Queequeg, all, along with Talise, in the original cast. Director Leonard Foglia who brought the work to life in Dallas will also direct in San Diego. The longtime musical director of the

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company, Karen Keltner, will conduct.

Meanwhile earlier (February 10 through 12) in the Novellus theater at the Yerba Buena Center in San Francisco, the always innovative Nicole Paiement's Ensemble Parallele will tackle John Harbison's third opera, *The Great Gatsby*. This work was a commission of the Metropolitan Opera in 1999.

This unique version is a re-orchestration for chamber orchestra by Jacques Desjardin commissioned by the ensemble and by the Aspen Festival. It will feature an outstanding cast including Opera San José alumnus Jason Detwiler as Nick Carraway. In the F. Scott Fitzgerald novel, Nick is the narrator. But Harbison, who wrote the libretto as well as the music, embeds him as a character in the opera

The music is full of musical references to the 1925 novel which cites popular songs of the Jazz Age. Dance (fox trot, Charleston, tango etc.), always a feature of Ms. Paiement's work, will be an important aspect of this new production. One critic was struck by the duality of the work which has the casual wildness of the 20s and the contrasting dramatic conflicts of the characters. Daisy, to be sung by Susannah Biller, will take on the role created by soprano Dawn Upshaw, to whom Harbison gave a full measure of trills and ornamentation. The role of cool golf-playing Jordan Baker will be performed by Julienne Walker, and Marco Pannuccio sings Gatsby.

It should be a very special operatic experience.

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## Career Updates

### Merola

Tenor **David Lomeli** (2008) will be making his Houston Grand Opera debut this month as Alfredo in *La Traviata*. His career received an enormous boost in 2006 when Placido Domingo offered him a berth in the young artist program at Los Angeles Opera. He has performed at Santa Fe Opera, Canadian Opera Company and Opera delle Lille. He has upcoming debuts set for Glyndebourne and Hollywood Bowl.

Bass Baritone **John Releya** (1995) will be singing the title role in Seattle Opera's new production of *Attila*.

**Lucas Meachem**, who begins this season at San Francisco Opera in *Don Giovanni*, sings the role of Mercutio at Palm Beach Opera in Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* this month. In April, he is Figaro in San Diego Opera's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. Then he travels to Toulouse for his role debut as Wolfram in a new production of *Tannhäuser* in June.

Soprano **Elza Van Den Heever** makes her company debut with Lyric Opera of Chicago, singing the role of Armida in Handel's *Rinaldo*. She takes on another Handel enchantress in May, when she sings the title role in *Alcina* for Opera National de Bordeaux, France.

### Opera San José

Baritone **Jason Detwiler** will sing the role of Nick in Ensemble Parallele's *The Great Gatsby* in fully-staged chamber opera performances at Yerba Buena Center on February 10, 11, 12.

Bass Baritone **Jesse Merlin** sang the role of Benoit and Alcindoro in *La Bohème* at Opera Santa Barbara in 2011, Angelotti in *Tosca* at Opera Las Vegas in 2011.

Baritone **Daniel Cilli** will sing the role of Don Giovanni, and soprano **Christina Major** will sing the role of Donna Ana in West Bay Opera's production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.

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# Calendar

FEB. 8 Metropolitan Opera Encore in HD, *The Enchanted Island*, New Production, 6:30 PM. Oakridge 20, 225-7340; Santana Row 6, 554-7010; and Cupertino 16, 408 871-2262.

FEB 11, Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, *Götterdämmerung* (new production) by Richard Wagner, live at CineArts Oakridge 20, 225-7340; Santana Row 6, 554-7010; and Cupertino 16 408 871-2262, 9AM, No encore is scheduled yet for this opera.

FEB. 11, 12, 16, 18, 19, 21, 24, 26, Opera San José, *La Traviata* by Verdi, 8pm except 3pm Sundays, tickets 408-437-4450 or [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org)

FEB. 12, Fundraiser for *The Face on the Barroom Floor*. 2PM to 5PM at St. Andrews Episcopal Church 13601 Saratoga Ave., Saratoga. Black tie optional. For more information call 408-655-1512 or 408-370-6564

FEB. 17, 19, 25, 26, West Bay Opera, *Don Giovanni* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, tickets 650-424-9999 or order online [www.WBOpera.org](http://www.WBOpera.org).

FEB 25, Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, *Ernani* by Verdi, 9:55 AM, live at CineArts Oakridge 20, 225-7340; Santana Row 6, 554-7010; and Cupertino 16 408 871-2262. Encore March 14, 6:30PM.

MARCH 14, Metropolitan Opera HD Encore *Ernani* by Verdi, 6:30 PM. See Feb. 25th listing.

APRIL 7, Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, *Manon* by Massenet, New Production, 9 AM, live at CineArts Oakridge 20, 225-7340; Santana Row 6, 554-7010; and Cupertino 16 408 871-2262. Encore April 25, 6:30PM.

APRIL 10, Opera San José preview of *Faust* by Gounod, MLK Library, Tues. 12PM to 1PM.

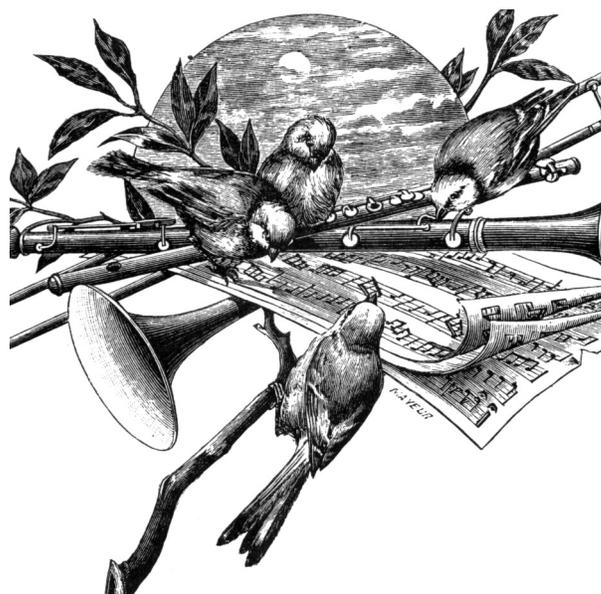
APRIL 14, Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, *La Traviata* by Verdi, 9:55 AM, live at CineArts Oakridge 20, 225-7340; Santana Row 6, 554-7010; and Cupertino 16 408 871-2262. Encore May 2, 6:30PM.

APRIL 21, 22, 26, 28, 29, MAY 1, 4, 6, Opera San José, *Faust* by Gounod, 8pm except 3pm, Sundays, tickets 408-437-4450 or [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org)

APRIL 25, Metropolitan Opera HD Encore, *Manon* by Massenet, 6:30PM. See February 25 listing.

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## An Invitation to Join

Established in 1947, the San José Opera Guild was formed to promote the appreciation and enjoyment of the operatic arts and to provide both volunteer and financial support to opera.

The Guild incorporated in September 1958 as a non-profit corporation under the laws of California. The original purpose of the Guild has not changed over the years since it's founding. Financial support of promising young artists in the community is a high priority for the Guild, which helps sponsor singers each year at Opera San José, and the Merola Opera Program, as well as other opera groups.

Throughout the year, the Guild sponsors lectures and previews at three different venues to coincide with the San Francisco Opera and Opera San José's seasons.

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