



MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM PRESENTS BENJAMIN BRITTEN'S

## THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA

July 13 & 15 at the Herbst Theatre in San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (16 June 2023) – Merola Opera Program continues its 2023 Summer Festival with a fully staged production of Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, approached through a current lens. Based on an ancient Roman myth, with a libretto by Ronald Duncan set to one of Britten's most searing and lyrical scores, *The Rape of Lucretia* follows the tale of dedicated spouse Lucretia, who becomes a target in a brutal weaponization of sexual assault for power. The work's violent subject matter will be explored in relation to today's climate, with post-performance discussions that bring the creative team together with audience members in an open format. "When we choose the repertoire that we present at Merola, we're guided by the overarching question: 'What can our artists learn from this?'" says Carrie-Ann Matheson, San Francisco Opera Center Artistic Director. "This work offers plentiful opportunities for growth and discovery. It provides an abundance of fascinating musical demands, and we are here to guide the Merolini through what may be their first foray into this side of Britten's unique compositional style." Maestro Judith Yan returns to Merola to conduct *The Rape of Lucretia*. Equally adept in symphony, opera, and ballet, Maestro Yan has conducted for major companies in Europe, Asia, Australia, and North America. German stage director Jan Eßinger makes his U.S. debut with this production. Known for bringing a fresh directorial perspective, Eßinger has helmed dozens of acclaimed productions throughout Europe, notably at the Theater Heidelberg, Opernhaus Zürich, Theater Koblenz, Philharmonie de Luxembourg, among many others. *The Rape of Lucretia* will be presented at 7:30pm, Thursday, July 13 and 2:00pm, Saturday, July 15, 2023 at the **Herbst Theatre**, 401 Van Ness Ave, San Francisco. For more information or to purchase tickets (\$10\*/\$55/\$80), the public may visit [www.merola.org](http://www.merola.org) or call the San Francisco Box Office at **(415) 864-3330**. *\*For audience members who have never*

*attended a Merola production, a limited quantity of \$10 tickets will be available with the code MEROLANEW. These Community Access tickets are sponsored by TogetherSF.*

“The opera deals with extremely difficult subject matter,” Matheson states. “For present day artists and audiences, the libretto is very problematic for many reasons, not the least of which is violence towards women, but also its disparagement of women, depiction of men, and other antiquated messaging. We will provide our artists with a safe, supported, informed, and respectful environment in which to explore the challenge of presenting this piece. Under the guidance of our carefully crafted team, they can learn how to engage with difficult topics, before heading out into the professional world where the same educational and developmental focus may not necessarily be present.”

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) was one of the leading British composers of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, whose works include *War Requiem* (1962), and the orchestral showpiece *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* (1946). A contentious objector in WWII, one of his early works was a *Pacifist's March* (1937), set to words by Ronald Duncan for the Peace Pledge Union. His first popular success came with *Peter Grimes* (1945), which captured critical and audience acclaim, and did better at the box office that season than either *La bohème* or *Madama Butterfly*. His two-act opera ***The Rape of Lucretia*** was written in 1946, just as World War II came to an end. The influences of this period, which were marked by the postwar uncertainties and traumas, as well as dramatic increases in crime and sexual violence, can be seen throughout this challenging work. The English libretto by Ronald Duncan was based on André Obey's drama, *Le Viol de Lucrece*. The opera was written for Kathleen Ferrier, who performed the title role at its premiere at the first post-war Glyndebourne Festival in July 1946. Two years later, this emotionally charged chamber opera made its American debut in a 1948 production at the Ziegfeld Theatre, directed by Agnes de Mille and starring Kitty Carlisle as Lucretia, with Giorgio Tozzi as Tarquinius. In 2013 the work was revived at Glyndebourne for the first time since its premiere, in an acclaimed production directed by actress Fiona Shaw. Based on the ancient Roman tragedy of Lucretia, the work's central story is that of a faithful wife who is sexually

assaulted by an arrogant prince, and finds she cannot live with what she perceives as the violation of her chastity. Rape continues to be employed as a war crime around the world, while according to the U.S. Department of Justice, an American is sexually assaulted every 68 seconds, and the national suicide rate continues to climb—making the opera’s theme of sexual violence and its traumatic aftermath starkly relevant today.

*The Rape of Lucretia* creative team is comprised of **Judith Yan** (Conductor), **Jan ElBinger** (Director), **Maya Herbsman** (Intimacy Director), **Sonja Füst** (Scenic Designer), **Christine Crook** (Costume Designer), and **David Robertson** (Lighting Designer). Casting includes mezzo-soprano **Natalie Lewis** as Lucretia, baritone **Samuel Kidd** as Prince Tarquinius, bass-baritone **James McCarthy** as Collatinus, mezzo-soprano **Simona Genga** as Bianca, soprano **Olivia Prendergast** as Lucia, baritone **Cameron Rolling** as Junius, tenor **Chance Jonas-O'Toole** as Male Chorus, and soprano **Caroline Corrales** as Female Chorus.

Following the July 15 matinee performance, the creative team and **San Francisco Women Against Rape (SFWAR) Executive Director Janelle White** will invite audience members to an open format discussion. In doing so, Merola hopes to offer additional learning opportunities for the participating artists and attendees. “Art has always been a catalyst for dialogue and reflection about important social issues; it can play an essential role in holding up a mirror to the ugly side of humanity. We cannot and must not pretend that side doesn’t exist,” adds Matheson. “It is our hope that by bringing people together with powerful music and drama, and openly sharing difficult and uncomfortable topics that confront us, we can, in community, become a part of the solution.”

#### **ABOUT MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM**

The **Merola Opera Program** is widely regarded as the foremost opera training program for aspiring singers, pianist/coaches, and stage directors. Merola nurtures the opera stars of tomorrow through master classes and private coaching sessions 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 to all participants, the Merola Opera Program is unique in the industry in many

ways. It was the first 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. Since Matheson and Beam formed the new Merola artistic team in 2021, the program has redoubled its efforts to provide exciting new curricula and added focus on preparing the burgeoning artists for extramusical aspects of a performance career. Learn more at [www.merola.org](http://www.merola.org).

#### **ABOUT SAN FRANCISCO WOMEN AGAINST RAPE (SFWAR)**

Founded in 1973, SFWAR provides resources, support, advocacy, and education to strengthen the work of all individuals and communities in San Francisco that are responding to, healing from, and struggling to end sexual violence. It delivers innovative crisis intervention services and social change programs for survivors of sexual assault and their communities. Learn more at [www.sfwar.org](http://www.sfwar.org).

#### **FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:**

**WHAT:** Merola Opera Program continues its 2023 Summer Festival with a fully staged production of Benjamin Britten's ***The Rape of Lucretia***, approached through a current lens. Based on an ancient Roman myth, with a libretto by Ronald Duncan set to one of Britten's most searing and lyrical scores, ***The Rape of Lucretia*** follows the tale of dedicated spouse Lucretia, who becomes a target in a brutal weaponization of sexual assault for power. The work's violent subject matter will be explored in relation to today's climate, with post-performance discussions that bring the creative team together with audience members in an open format. Maestro Judith Yan returns to Merola to conduct ***The Rape of Lucretia***. Equally adept in symphony, opera, and ballet, Maestro Yan has conducted for major companies in Europe, Asia, Australia, and North America. German stage director Jan Eßinger makes his U.S. debut with this production. Known for bringing a fresh directorial perspective, Eßinger has helmed dozens of acclaimed productions throughout Europe, notably at the Theater Heidelberg, Opernhaus Zürich, Theater Koblenz, Philharmonie de Luxembourg, and many others.

**WHEN:** 7:30pm, Thursday, July 13  
2:00pm, Saturday, July 15

**WHERE:** **Herbst Theatre and Veterans Building**, 401 Van Ness Ave, San Francisco

**TICKETS:** Tickets (\$10\*/\$55/\$80) are available at [www.merola.org](http://www.merola.org).

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*Community Access tickets are sponsored by TogetherSF. Prices, programs, and discount offers are subject to change.*

**INFO:** For more information or to order tickets, please visit [www.merola.org](http://www.merola.org) or call the San Francisco Box Office at **(415) 864-3330**. The box office is open Monday, 10:00am-5:00pm, and Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00am-6:00pm (Saturday phones only).

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**PHOTOS:** Downloadable high-res photos are available here: <https://cbpr.co/press/lucretia/>