

MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM ANNOUNCES 2026 MEROLA ARTISTS

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (2 December 2025) – One of the most prestigious opera training programs in the world, San Francisco’s acclaimed **Merola Opera Program** has selected 28 artists from a pool of more than 1,500 international applicants to participate in its 2026 program. This year’s cohort of participants hail from Australia, China, South Korea, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom, as well as across North America including United States, Mexico, and Canada.

This year, Merola received a record-breaking number of applicants, reflecting the program’s growing visibility and appeal. The surge in submissions underscores the strength of the community and the impact of Merola’s work.

“We are excited to welcome the 2026 Merola class to San Francisco for a summer that will be both artistically rigorous and deeply enriching,” said San Francisco Opera Center Artistic Director **Carrie-Ann Matheson** and General Manager **Markus Beam** (Merola ’02). “Their talent and commitment represent the vibrant future of opera, and we look forward to helping them thrive in this uniquely transformative environment.”

“This year will mark a summer of transformative growth in San Francisco for this remarkable group of artists,” shared Merola Executive Director **Sean Waugh**. “Once they have completed this program, they will join a vibrant community of distinguished alumni who have gone on to thrilling careers with major opera houses around the world. They take with them the support of Merola’s vast network of dedicated members and supporters, all focused on a commitment to opera’s future.”

Public performances for the 2026 Merola Summer Festival will be announced in the spring. The public can find more information about the 2026 participants, including bio highlights and headshots at merola.org.

The 2026 Merola Opera Program artists include:

Sopranos

Shannon Crowley, *Virginia Beach, Virginia*
Adia Evans, *Baltimore, Maryland*
Charlotte Kelso, *Adelaide, Australia*
Abigail Raiford, *Tulsa, Oklahoma*
Jennifer Robinson, *Lakeland, Florida*
Emilie Kealani, *San Francisco, California*
Anna Thompson, *Rochester, Michigan*

Mezzo-Sopranos

Theo Claveles, *Lebanon, Connecticut*
Katherine Dobbs, *Appleton, Wisconsin*

Mezzo-Sopranos (cont.)

Stella FitzGerald, *Austin, Texas*
Ariana Maubach, *Toronto, Ontario, Canada*

Tenors

Chester Seungyup Han, *Seoul, South Korea*
Ryan Bryce Johnson, *Muleshoe, Texas*
Cole McIlquham, *Osseo, Wisconsin*
Matthew Sink, *Las Vegas, Nevada*
Charles Styles, *Tamworth, United Kingdom*
Logan Wagner, *Villa Hills, Kentucky*

Baritones

Paul Jang, *Seoul, South Korea*
Enes Pektaş, *Mersin, Türkiye*

Bass

Theo Harrah, *Louisville, Kentucky*
John Mburu, *Atlanta, Georgia*
Raúl Morales Velazco, *Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, Mexico*

Pianists/Coaches

Sakurako Jayne Abe, *Toronto, Ontario, Canada*
Eric Head, *Fairmont, Minnesota*
Deven Shah, *Erie, Pennsylvania*
Tony Stauffer, *Montreal, Québec, Canada*
Yue Qi Zhang, *Nanjing, Jiangsu, China*

Stage Director

Claire Choquette, *Edmond, Oklahoma*

ABOUT THE MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM

The **Merola Opera Program** is widely regarded as the foremost opera training program for aspiring singers, pianists, and stage directors. Merola nurtures the opera stars of tomorrow through master classes and private coaching with opera's most accomplished singers, coaches, 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, providing a comprehensive curriculum with a strong emphasis on developing the "whole" artist. This includes personal and leadership development, financial planning, mental and physical wellness, as well as public relations and branding. 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. Learn more at merola.org.

-30-

MEDIA: Paige D'Encarnacao, CBCO Public Relations & Marketing
paige@cb-pr.com | 415-570-2623

PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available here: <https://cbpr.co/press/Merola2026>