



MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM ANNOUNCES
2026 SEASON
SUMMER FESTIVAL TO INCLUDE
NEAPOLITAN INSPIRED VOCAL/PIANO RECITAL,
TWO OPERAS, ANNUAL GRAND FINALE
June 25 – August 15, 2026

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (14 April 2026) — San Francisco’s acclaimed **Merola Opera Program** has unveiled its thrilling 2026 season. The Summer Festival will feature a Neapolitan-inspired vocal/piano recital, two operas, and the annual Grand Finale concert. This year, 28 artists were selected from a pool of more than 1,500 international applicants to participate in the program. The 2026 cohort of participants hail from Australia, China, South Korea, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom, as well as from across North America, including the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

Merola Executive Director **Sean Waugh** said, “We’re delighted to begin another summer at Merola in San Francisco. This season brings together our exceptional Merola members and a new cohort of talented artists, and we invite audiences to experience the artistry and energy firsthand. It’s especially meaningful to welcome back alumni who now return as mentors and leaders, a powerful reflection of the enduring community and legacy at the heart of this extraordinary program.”

San Francisco Opera Center Artistic Director **Carrie-Ann Matheson** and General Manager **Markus Beam** (Merola ’02), who lead Merola’s artistic programming, shared, “This season’s repertoire is ambitious, and we look forward to watching our artists rise to its challenges. These are works that demand a great deal from a young artist — technically, dramatically, and emotionally — and that is precisely the intention. We have designed the summer around the belief that real artistic growth occurs when meaningful challenge is backed by solid support, and we are eager to see our 2026 artists take creative risks, deepen their artistry, and forge lasting relationships with themselves, one another, and our audiences.”

The 2026 Merola Summer Festival begins June 25 with *L’Anima Napoletana*, a vibrant vocal/piano recital featuring Neapolitan songs from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This program captures the warmth, passion, and emotional richness of Southern Italy through folk-inspired melodies and romantic harmonies. The Festival continues July 9 and 11 with Peter Brook’s *La Tragédie de Carmen*, a condensed adaptation of Bizet’s most famous opera. This intimate production explores the intense psychological conflict between Carmen’s fierce independence and Don José’s obsessive love, unfolding as a stark, inevitable tragedy,

accompanied by the San Francisco Opera Center Orchestra. On July 30 and August 1, Merola presents Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, a fully staged production where tragedy and comedy collide. A grieving heroine, abandoned on a deserted island, is interrupted by a mischievous troupe until the arrival of the god Bacchus transforms her despair into transcendent love. All three programs – *L'Anima Napoletana*, *La Tragédie de Carmen*, and *Ariadne auf Naxos* – take place at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music's Caroline H. Hume Concert Hall. The season culminates on August 15 with the **Merola Grand Finale**, a spectacular concert celebrating opera's rising stars. Held at the War Memorial Opera House, this exhilarating program features arias and ensembles with a full orchestra. Following the performance, guests can attend an exclusive reception with the artists at The Wilsey Center for Opera (separate admission: \$85).

Individual performance tickets will be available to Merola members Tuesday, April 14, with remaining tickets available to the public beginning Friday, May 1. For more information on how to become a member, visit merola.org/membership. Patrons can also save on tickets by purchasing the full four-production Merola Summer Festival package. Members receive 20% off when buying between Tuesday, April 14 and Thursday, April 30, or 10% off when purchasing between Friday, May 1 and Wednesday, June 24. Tickets (*pricing for individual events below*) and more information are available at merola.org or by calling the San Francisco Opera Box Office at 415-864-3330.

The 2025 Merola Summer Festival performance schedule:

L'Anima Napoletana

7:00pm, Thursday, June 25, 2026

San Francisco Conservatory of Music's Caroline H. Hume Concert Hall
50 Oak St., San Francisco

Curated by Merola faculty member **Mario Antonio Marra**, *L'Anima Napoletana* presents a selection of Neapolitan songs that celebrate the lyrical beauty, emotional depth, and distinctive character of Southern Italy. Spanning the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these works combine folk-inspired melodies with refined Romantic harmonies, exploring themes of love, longing, joy, and nostalgia. This vocal/piano recital captures the warmth, passion, and rhythmic vitality of Southern Italy, offering an intimate portrait of a musical tradition that bridges popular song and classical art music. The program will be performed in Italian and Neapolitan dialect with English supertitles.

Peter Brook's *La Tragédie de Carmen*

7:00pm, Thursday, July 9 & 2:00pm, Saturday, July 11, 2026

San Francisco Conservatory of Music Caroline H. Hume Concert Hall
50 Oak St., San Francisco

With two Merola alumnae at the helm, Conductor **Stephanie Rhodes Russell** (Merola '09) and Director **Mo Zhou** (Merola '15) will lead *La Tragédie de Carmen*, a condensed and starker adaptation of Bizet's *Carmen* created by Peter Brook, Jean-Claude Carrière, and Marius Constant. This version strips the opera down to its core characters, focusing intensely on the psychological tension between Carmen's insistence on absolute freedom and Don José's obsessive love. Prioritizing inevitability and emotional intensity over spectacle, this production presents an intimate tragedy propelled by desire, jealousy, and fate. The opera will be performed

in French with English supertitles. This production is by arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., Sole Agent in the US, Canada, and Mexico for Editions Salabert, a Universal Music Publishing Group company, publisher, and copyright owner.

Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*

7:00pm, Thursday, July 30 & 2:00pm, Saturday, August 1, 2026
San Francisco Conservatory of Music Caroline H. Hume Concert Hall
50 Oak St., San Francisco

Ariadne auf Naxos, composed by Richard Strauss with a libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and conducted by conductor **Ann-Katrin Stöcker** under the direction of director **Omer Ben Seadia** (Merola '14), blends mythological tragedy with comic opera in two parts. The work opens with a prologue that shows a clash between serious and comic performers forced to share the stage, while the main opera depicts Ariadne's despair after abandonment on Naxos. She is countered by Zerbinetta's playful view of love, until the god Bacchus brings renewal and transformation. Celebrated for its inventive structure, virtuosic vocal writing, and seamless fusion of contrasting styles, the work holds an important place in the operatic canon as a sophisticated meditation on the relationship between art, emotion, and theatrical form. The opera will be performed in German with English supertitles.

Merola Grand Finale

7:30pm, Saturday, August 15, 2026
War Memorial Opera House
301 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco

The **Merola Grand Finale** marks the culmination of the summer season, bringing together participants for a vibrant showcase of operatic selections at the War Memorial Opera House. Conducted by **William Long** and directed by 2026 Merola Stage Director **Claire Choquette**, this electrifying performance features arias, ensembles, and scenes from across the repertoire, highlighting the technical skill and artistic growth the artists have achieved throughout the program. Audiences will celebrate the artists' progress in a capstone demonstration of their work in the home of San Francisco Opera. Following the performance, join the Merola artists for a celebratory reception at the Wilsey Center for Opera (separate ticket required). Performed with English supertitles.

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.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: San Francisco's acclaimed **Merola Opera Program** has unveiled its thrilling 2026 season. The Summer Festival will feature a Neapolitan-inspired voice and piano recital, two operas, and the annual Grand Finale concert. This year, 28 artists were selected from a pool of more than 1,500 international applicants to participate in the program. The 2026 cohort of participants hail from Australia, China, South Korea, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom, as well as from across North America, including the United States, Mexico, and Canada. The 2026 Merola Summer Festival begins June 25 with *L'Anima Napoletana*, a vibrant vocal and piano recital featuring Neapolitan songs from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Festival continues July 9 and 11 with Peter Brook's *La Tragédie de Carmen*, a condensed adaptation of Bizet's most famous opera, accompanied by the San Francisco Opera Center Orchestra. On July 30 and August 1, Merola presents Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, a fully staged production where tragedy and comedy collide, accompanied by the San Francisco Opera Center Orchestra. All three programs – *L'Anima Napoletana*, *La Tragédie de Carmen*, and *Ariadne auf Naxos* – take place at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music's Caroline H. Hume Concert Hall. The season culminates on August 15 with the **Merola Grand Finale**, a spectacular staged concert celebrating opera's rising stars. Held at the War Memorial Opera House, this exhilarating program features arias and ensembles with orchestra. Following the performance, guests can attend an exclusive reception with the artists at The Wilsey Center for Opera (separate admission: \$85).

WHEN: *L'Anima Napoletana*
7:00pm, June 25, 2026 – San Francisco Conservatory of Music Caroline H. Hume Concert Hall

Tickets: \$55; \$75; \$25 (ages 25 and under)

Peter Brook's *La Tragédie de Carmen*

7:00pm, July 9, 2026 – San Francisco Conservatory of Music Caroline H. Hume Concert Hall

2:00pm, July 11, 2026 – San Francisco Conservatory of Music Caroline H. Hume Concert Hall

Tickets: \$75; \$25 (25 and under)

Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*

7:00pm, July 30, 2026 – San Francisco Conservatory of Music Caroline H. Hume Concert Hall

2:00pm, August 1, 2026 – San Francisco Conservatory of Music Caroline H.
Hume Concert Hall
Tickets: \$75; \$25 (ages 25 and under)

Merola Grand Finale and Reception

7:30pm, August 15, 2026 – War Memorial Opera House
Tickets: \$95/\$75/\$65/\$35; \$25/\$15 (ages 25 and under)
*Reception Tickets: \$85**

**The reception will take place at The Wilsey Center for Opera*

WHERE: **San Francisco Conservatory of Music**, 50 Oak St., San Francisco
War Memorial Opera House, 301 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco

TICKETS: Tickets are currently on sale for Merola members (for information on how to become a member, visit merola.org/membership) and will be available to the public May 1, 2026 at merola.org.

Tickets range from \$25–\$95 (see above for specific pricing for each event), \$15–\$25 for ages 25 and under (valid ID required), and \$85 tickets for the Merola Grand Finale reception.

Patrons can also save on tickets by purchasing the full four-production Merola Summer Festival package. Receive 20% off when buying between Tuesday, April 14 and Thursday, April 30, or 10% off when purchasing between Friday, May 1 and Wednesday, June 24.

INFO: For more information or to order tickets, please visit merola.org or call the San Francisco Opera Box Office at **415-864-3330**. The box office and Group Sales are open Monday, 10:00am-5:00pm, and Tuesday through Friday, 10:00am-6:00pm.

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MEDIA: Contact Paige D'Encarnacao, CBCO Public Relations & Marketing
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PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available here:
<https://cbpr.co/press/merola2026/>