



MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM CONTINUES SEASON

LA TRAGÉDIE DE CARMEN

PETER BROOK'S REINTERPRETATION OF BIZET'S MASTERPIECE

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

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (1 June 2026) — San Francisco's acclaimed **Merola Opera Program**, one of the world's most prestigious opera training programs, continues its 2026 season with *La Tragédie de Carmen*. This condensed, thrilling adaptation of Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, created by visionary theatre director **Peter Brook** presents the opera in a raw and psychologically intense form, with a revised score edited by composer Marius Constant, and a libretto by French writer and dramatist Jean-Claude Carrière that more closely hews to the original Prosper Mérimée novella on which Bizet's opera was based. Two Merola alumnae, Conductor **Stephanie Rhodes Russell** ('09) and Director **Mo Zhou** ('15), lead this production, which focuses on the gripping tension between Carmen's insistence on absolute freedom and Don José's obsessive control. Prioritizing intimacy and inevitability over spectacle, the performance unfolds as an intimate tragedy driven by desire, jealousy, and fate. *La Tragédie de Carmen* will be presented 7:00pm, Thursday, July 9, and 2:00pm, Saturday, July 11, 2026, at the **San Francisco Conservatory of Music Caroline H. Hume Concert Hall**, 50 Oak St., San Francisco. *La Tragédie de Carmen* will be performed in French with English supertitles. For more information or to purchase tickets (\$75; \$25, ages 25 and under), the public may visit merola.org or call the San Francisco Box Office at **415-864-3330**.

"Returning to Merola in these new roles is deeply meaningful for both of us," said **Stephanie Rhodes Russell** and **Mo Zhou**. "The Merola Opera Program played a pivotal role in shaping our artistic paths, and it's an honor to come back not only to collaborate, but to help guide and mentor the next generation of rising opera stars as they find their own voices and artistic identities. Being back in this capacity feels like a true full-circle moment, and it speaks to Merola's enduring commitment to fostering growth, not only for its artists, but for its alumni as they continue to evolve and give back to the art form."

This production features a cast of rising opera artists from the 2026 Merola Opera Program, selected from a highly competitive international pool. These emerging singers represent the next generation of operatic talent, bringing fresh insight and vocal excellence to this powerful work. *La Tragédie de Carmen* stars Canadian mezzo-soprano **Ariana Maubach** in the title role as the free-spirited, defiant, and fiercely independent Carmen. The obsessive and jealous Don José will be portrayed by English tenor **Charles Styles**. Fresh off her Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition win, soprano **Anna Thompson** takes on the role of the gentle and compassionate

Micaëla, while Mexican baritone **Raúl Morales Velazco** appears as the charismatic Escamillo. Tenor **Ryan Bryce Johnson** will perform the role of the military officer Zuniga; **John Mburu** portrays Garcia, Carmen's husband, and tenor **Logan Wager** rounds out the cast as Lilas Pastia, the tavern and café owner.

Peter Brook was a highly influential theatre and film director whose work reshaped modern stagecraft through its emphasis on simplicity, clarity, and emotional truth. Rejecting overly ornate production styles, Brook championed what he called “empty space,” the idea that theatre only requires an actor, an audience, and a shared space for imagination to take hold. Across a career spanning more than seven decades, he directed landmark productions such as *Marat/Sade*, *The Mahabharata*, and his celebrated adaptation *La Tragédie de Carmen*, each reflecting his interest in distilling complex stories into their essential human and theatrical elements. Brook worked internationally, particularly in London and Paris, and was known for blending Western and non-Western performance traditions to explore universal themes of conflict, spirituality, and connection.

Inspired by Prosper Mérimée's novella, Bizet's *Carmen* tells the story of a fiercely independent woman whose refusal to conform to societal expectations ultimately leads to her downfall. In Peter Brook's *La Tragédie de Carmen*, however, the work is not simply a condensed version of Bizet's opera, but a radical reimagining that reframes the material as a tightly focused chamber drama centered on psychological tension and human impulse. As *The New York Times* observed, it is “not Bizet's or Mérimée's ‘Carmen,’” but Brook's own distilled interpretation of the story, reshaped through his minimalist theatrical sensibility. Stripped of operatic grandeur, the production heightens closeness or emotional directness, concentrating attention on the volatile dynamic between Carmen and Don José and the destructive forces of desire, control, and fate. A later review in *The Guardian* similarly highlights the production's stark theatricality and visceral intensity in performance, emphasizing how the pared-back staging sharpens the opera's dramatic impact. *San Francisco Classical Voice* noted, it is “a marvel of economy and intensified emotion. Brilliantly adapted... this 1981 work ... is a cunning reshaping and re-imagining of its source material,” underscoring Brook's ability to transform a familiar opera into something newly urgent and dramatically concentrated.

The creative team for *La Tragédie de Carmen* includes **Stephanie Rhodes Russell** (Conductor) and **Mo Zhou** (Director).

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

ABOUT CONDUCTOR STEPHANIE RHODES RUSSELL:

American conductor, collaborative pianist, and opera music director, **Stephanie Rhodes Russell** is recognized for her work with leading opera companies and orchestras across the United States. She currently serves as associate professor and music director of opera at the University of North Texas, where she leads operatic productions and trains emerging artists. In parallel, she is the resident conductor of the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, where she conducts education, community, and symphonic programming while continuing her work on the main subscription

series as cover conductor. Russell's career includes significant engagements with major institutions such as the Dallas Opera, Houston Grand Opera, San Francisco Opera, Los Angeles Opera, and Washington National Opera, where she has worked extensively on music staff as conductor, assistant conductor, and rehearsal pianist. She is also an alum of the Merola Opera Program, the Houston Grand Opera Studio, and the Dallas Opera's Hart Institute for Women Conductors. A Fulbright recipient, she spent time in Moscow specializing in Russian repertoire and diction, including work at the Bolshoi Theatre, and has been commissioned to transliterate Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta*. Her expertise in Russian opera and language coaching remains a defining aspect of her artistic profile. Her recent seasons include conducting engagements with companies such as Utah Opera, Arizona Opera, Washington National Opera, and Madison Opera, along with orchestral work including Prokofiev and Stravinsky programs with the Sacramento Philharmonic & Opera. In addition to her conducting career, Russell is the founder of the Women's Artistic Leadership Initiative, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering young women in the arts through leadership training and professional development.

ABOUT DIRECTOR MO ZHOU

Chinese-born stage director **Mo Zhou** is known for her innovative, boundary-pushing productions that reimagine classical repertoire through a modern, socially conscious lens on major international stages including the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, Elbphilharmonie, the National Centre for the Performing Arts in China, and leading North American opera companies. Her recent work includes a series of high-profile productions such as *Madama Butterfly*, *La bohème*, *Così fan tutte*, and the world premiere of her children's opera *The Big Swim*. In the 2025/26 season, she continued her collaboration with companies including Houston Grand Opera, Calgary Opera, Arizona Opera, Opera Grand Rapids, and Opera Colorado, while also serving as Guest Artistic Director on new projects. Zhou's work is widely recognized for its cinematic storytelling, psychological depth, and cultural reframing of traditional operatic narratives. Her reimaginings often interrogate issues of history, identity, and representation, most notably in her acclaimed productions of *Madama Butterfly*, which have been praised for adding historical context and challenging long-standing stereotypes. In addition to her directing career, Zhou is a dedicated educator and mentor to emerging artists. She has taught and led masterclasses at institutions including the University of Michigan, The Juilliard School, Aspen Music Festival and School, and Houston Grand Opera's Butler Studio. She trained at The Juilliard School, Columbia University, Bowdoin College, and participated in prestigious programs including the Merola Opera Program, Wolf Trap Opera, and the Glimmerglass Festival. She is a recipient of OPERA America's Robert L. B. Tobin Director-Designer Prize and Grants for Women Stage Directors and Conductors.

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

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: San Francisco's acclaimed **Merola Opera Program**, one of the world's most prestigious opera training programs, continues its 2026 season with ***La Tragédie de Carmen***. This condensed, thrilling adaptation of Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, created by visionary theatre director **Peter Brook** presents the opera in a raw and psychologically intense form, with a revised score edited by composer Marius Constant, and a libretto by French writer and dramatist Jean-Claude Carrière that more closely hews to the original Prosper Mérimée novella on which Bizet's opera was based. Two Merola alumnae, Conductor **Stephanie Rhodes Russell** ('09) and Director **Mo Zhou** ('15), lead this production, which focuses on the gripping tension between Carmen's insistence on absolute freedom and Don José's obsessive control. Prioritizing intimacy and inevitability over spectacle, the performance unfolds as an intimate tragedy driven by desire, jealousy, and fate.

WHEN: 7:00pm, July 9, 2026
2:00pm, July 11, 2026

WHERE: **San Francisco Conservatory of Music**, 50 Oak St., San Francisco

TICKETS: **\$75; \$25 (25 and under)**

For more information on how to become a member, visit merola.org/membership. Tickets and more information are available at merola.org or by calling the San Francisco Opera Box Office at 415-864-3330.

Patrons can also save on tickets by purchasing the full four-production Merola Summer Festival package. Receive 10% off when purchasing now through 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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PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available here: <https://cbpr.co/press/latragediedecarmen>