



MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM CONCLUDES 2026 SUMMER FESTIVAL WITH **MEROLA GRAND FINALE**

7:30pm, Saturday, August 15, 2026, War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO (15 July 2026) — San Francisco's acclaimed **Merola Opera Program**, one of the world's most prestigious opera training programs, will close its 2026 Summer Festival with the annual **Merola Grand Finale**. This electrifying performance showcases tomorrow's opera superstars in a thrilling evening of arias, ensembles, and scenes spanning both beloved classics and bold contemporary repertoire onstage at San Francisco's glittering War Memorial Opera House. This summer's program features 28 artists selected by Merola from over 1,500 international applicants, with participants representing Europe, Asia, Australia, and North America. Conducted by **William Long**, who previously led Merola's 2025 *Schwabacher Summer Concert*, and directed by 2026 Merola Stage Director **Claire Choquette**, the program highlights the remarkable technical command, expressive range, and artistic growth of these emerging artists offering up a celebratory capstone performance at the home of the San Francisco Opera. Following the performance, Merola will offer an opportunity to join the artists for a celebratory reception at the Wilsey Center for Opera (additional ticket required - \$85). The **Merola Grand Finale** will be presented **7:30pm, Saturday, August 15, 2026**, at the **War Memorial Opera House**, 301 Van Ness Ave, San Francisco. Performed with English supertitles. For more information or to purchase tickets (\$95/\$75/\$65/\$35; \$25/\$15 (ages 25 and under)), the public may visit merola.org or call the San Francisco Box Office at **415-864-3330**.

The program will showcase a rich and stylistically diverse selection of repertoire spanning opera, song, and musical theater. Audiences will enjoy beloved works by celebrated composers including Mozart, Verdi, Massenet, Puccini, Donizetti, and Gounod. It will also include compelling selections from John Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles*, Hector Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, Terence Blanchard's *Champion*, Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe's *My Fair Lady*, and Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West* and *La Rondine*. The repertoire will be presented in French, German, Italian, English, Spanish, Korean, and Turkish with English supertitles, highlighting both the breadth of the operatic canon and the global traditions that continue to shape it. Program and repertoire selections are subject to change.

The 2026 Merola Opera Program artists include:

- **Sakurako Jayne Abe** *Hokkaido, Japan* (Pianist/Coach)
- **Theo Claveles** *Lebanon, Connecticut* (Mezzo-Soprano)
- **Claire Choquette** *Edmond, Oklahoma* (Stage Director)
- **Shannon Crowley** *Virginia Beach, Virginia* (Soprano)
- **Katherine Dobbs** *Appleton, Wisconsin* (Mezzo-Soprano)
- **Adia Evans** *Baltimore, Maryland* (Soprano)
- **Stella FitzGerald** *Austin, Texas* (Mezzo-Soprano)
- **Theo Harrah** *Louisville, Kentucky* (Bass)

- **Chester Seungyup Han** *Seoul, South Korea* (Tenor)
- **Eric Head** *Fairmont, Minnesota* (Pianist/Coach)
- **Paul Jang** *Seoul, South Korea* (Baritone)
- **Ryan Bryce Johnson** *Muleshoe, Texas* (Tenor)
- **Emilie Kealani** *San Francisco, California* (Soprano)
- **Charlotte Kelso** *Adelaide, Australia* (Soprano)
- **Ariana Maubach** *Toronto, Ontario, Canada* (Mezzo-Soprano)
- **John Mburu** *Atlanta, Georgia* (Bass)
- **Cole McIlquham** *Osseo, Wisconsin* (Tenor)
- **Raúl Morales Velazco** *Coatzacoalcas, Veracruz, Mexico* (Bass)
- **Enes Pektaş** *Mersin, Türkiye* (Baritone)
- **Abigail Raiford** *Tulsa, Oklahoma* (Soprano)
- **Jennifer Robinson** *Lakeland, Florida* (Soprano)
- **Deven Shah** *Erie, Pennsylvania* (Pianist/Coach)
- **Matthew Sink** *Las Vegas, Nevada* (Tenor)
- **Tony Stauffer** *Montreal, Québec, Canada* (Pianist/Coach)
- **Charles Styles** *Tamworth, United Kingdom* (Tenor)
- **Anna Thompson** *Rochester, Michigan* (Soprano)
- **Logan Wagner** *Villa Hills, Kentucky* (Tenor)
- **Yue Qi Zhang** *Nanjing, Jiangsu, China* (Pianist/Coach)

ABOUT WILLIAM LONG

Grammy Award–winning conductor **William Long** is recognized for his dynamic interpretations and versatility across opera and symphonic repertoire. He received the 2024 Grammy Award for Best Opera Recording for Terence Blanchard’s *Champion* at The Metropolitan Opera and is a recipient of the Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Award. Recent highlights include conducting *Carmen* at Washington National Opera, making his debut with the London Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican, conducting the world premiere of Blanchard’s *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, and making his Carnegie Hall debut with The Met Orchestra Chamber Ensemble. During the 2025–26 season, Long made his Houston Grand Opera debut conducting *Hänsel und Gretel* and returned to The Metropolitan Opera for *Carmen* and *The Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*. He has served on the music staff of The Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Washington National Opera, and Los Angeles Opera.

ABOUT CLAIRE CHOQUETTE

Award-winning stage director **Claire Choquette** (Merola '26) gained national recognition in 2022 when her innovative concept for Richard Strauss's *Salome* won OPERA America's prestigious Robert L.B. Tobin Director-Designer Prize. A recipient of the 2025–26 National Opera Association JoElyn Wakefield-Wright Stage Director Fellowship, she has quickly emerged as one of opera's most promising young directors. Recent directing credits include *Little Women* at Fort Worth Opera, *The Impresario* at Opera Baltimore, *Scalia/Ginsburg* at Charlottesville Opera, *Lucia di Lammermoor* at Painted Sky Opera, *La Bohème* at Shreveport Opera, and productions with Boston University Opera Institute and the Verdigris Ensemble. She

has also held resident assistant director positions with Wolf Trap Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, The Dallas Opera Outreach, and Painted Sky Opera.

Media sponsor for Merola Opera Program's 2026 Summer Festival is *San Francisco Chronicle*.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: San Francisco's acclaimed **Merola Opera Program**, one of the world's most prestigious opera training programs, will close its 2026 Summer Festival with the annual **Merola Grand Finale**. This electrifying performance showcases tomorrow's opera superstars in a thrilling evening of arias, ensembles, and scenes spanning both beloved classics and bold contemporary repertoire onstage at San Francisco's glittering War Memorial Opera House. This summer's program features 28 artists selected by Merola from over 1,500 international applicants, with participants representing Europe, Asia, Australia, and North America. Conducted by **William Long**, who previously led Merola's 2025 *Schwabacher Summer Concert*, and directed by 2026 Merola Stage Director **Claire Choquette**, the program highlights the remarkable technical command, expressive range, and artistic growth of these emerging artists offering up a celebratory capstone performance at the home of the San Francisco Opera. Following the performance, Merola will offer an opportunity to join the artists for a celebratory reception at the Wilsey Center for Opera (additional ticket required - \$85).

WHEN: 7:30pm, Saturday, August 15, 2026

WHERE: **San Francisco War Memorial Opera House**
301 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco

TICKETS: 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

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.

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/grandfinale2026/>