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Kia Ora Foundation sponsors New Zealand singers Amina Edris and James Ioelu in the world-renowned Merola Opera Program's 2015 summer training program

SAN FRANCISCO, UPDATED July 1, 2015 – The Kia Ora Foundation will sponsor two singers from New Zealand, soprano Amina Edris and bass-baritone James Ioelu, in the 2015 Merola Opera Program. Edris and Ioelu were chosen from over 800 artists who applied for this world-renowned summer opera training program. They, along with twenty-one other singers, five apprentice coaches, and one apprentice stage director, representing seven countries, will participate in the 58th season of the Merola Opera Program from June 8 to August 22.

The Kia Ora Foundation contributed \$10,000 (\$5000 for each singer) to sponsor Edris and Ioelu. Merola's training program is offered free of tuition to the participants and Merola also covers travel to and from San Francisco and provides housing and weekly stipend while the artists are in the program. Sponsors play an important role in funding the artists.

Edris and Ioelu will both appear in Merola's production of *Don Pasquale* (Edris as Norina, Ioelu in the title role) which will be presented at the Cowell Theater at Fort Mason Center on August 6 (7:30 pm) and August 8 (2:00 pm). They will also participate in public master classes with opera luminaries Jane Eaglen, Martin Katz, Malcolm Martineau, James Morris, and Antony Walker. Edris and Ioelu, along with the other young artists in the program, will perform in the Merola Grand Finale concert on the stage of the War Memorial Opera House on August 22.

ABOUT MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM

Led artistically by San Francisco Opera Center Director and internationally acclaimed soprano Sheri Greenawald, the Merola Opera Program is an independent nonprofit organization that operates in collaboration with the San Francisco Opera. Founded in 1957 and named for San Francisco Opera's founder, Gaetano Merola, the Program is recognized as one of the most prestigious operatic training programs in the world. The Merola Opera Program typically receives more than 800 applications for approximately 29 positions. Throughout the summer, the Merola artists participate in master classes and

private coaching with opera's most accomplished singers and performers. Participants, who include singers, apprentice coaches and an apprentice stage director, also receive training in operatic repertory, foreign languages, diction, acting and stage movement. The Merola program artists appear in public performances throughout the summer. The Merola Opera Program Summer Festival includes two staged operas, a scenes program and a concert.

Offered free of charge for all participants, the Merola Opera Program is unique in the industry in many ways. Merola is the only young artist program to provide financial support to developing artists for five years following participation. In the past year alone, more than \$150,000 was distributed to more than 100 artists, supporting their essential career development costs including coaching, language classes, and audition travel. Fourteen internationally acclaimed Merola alumni—thirteen singers and one conductor—will appear with the San Francisco Opera in 2015: René Barbera (2008), Catherine Cook (1990), Leah Crocetto (2008), Mark Delavan (1985), AJ Glueckert (2012), Susan Graham (1987), Thomas Hampson (1980), Philip Horst (1999), Bryan Hymel (2001), Daveda Karanas (2007), Daniela Mack (2007), Nadine Sierra (2010), Alek Shrader (2007), Philippe Sly (2011) and Patrick Summers (1986, 1987). In addition, only Merola graduates are considered for participation in the San Francisco Opera's Adler Fellowship program. A full season calendar is included at the end of the press release. For more information on Amina Edris and James Ioelu, please visit www.merola.org/merolaartists. To download press photos of the 2015 Merola artists, please visit <https://merolaoperaprogram.box.com/merola2015> (no password required; for media use only). For more information about the Merola Opera Program, please visit www.merola.org or call (415) 551-6299.

ABOUT KIA ORA FOUNDATION

Kia Ora Foundation has, since 1997, funded scholarships for education in music performance and in applied science for New Zealand students. The Foundation offers annually the Patricia Pratt Scholarship for musical performance, which is valid for up to two years' post-graduate international study. The Charles Campbell-White Undergraduate Scholarship in Applied Sciences is endowed annually at the University of Otago in Dunedin.

Applicants for the Patricia Pratt Scholarship are invited to apply in March through the scholarship's administrator, Te Pokai Tara - Universities New Zealand (TPTUNZ). The Charles Campbell-White Undergraduate scholarship is awarded annually by application through the University of Otago.

CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

2015 Merola Opera Summer Festival

Calendar of Performances

Tickets for all performances may be purchased by calling San Francisco Opera Box Office at (415) 864-3330 or by visiting www.sfopera.com. The box office is open Monday, 10 am to 5 pm and Tuesday through Friday, 10 am to 6 pm.

Thursday, July 9 at 7:30 pm

San Francisco Conservatory of Music, 50 Oak St., San Francisco

Merola Opera Program: **Schwabacher Summer Concert**

Valéry Ryvkin – conductor

Roy Rallo – director

Meredith Mecum and Toni Marie Palmertree – sopranos

Raehann Bryce-Davis – mezzo-soprano

Michael Papincak – tenor

Sol Jin - baritone

Scott Russell and Ming Zhao – basses

Program:

Floyd - *Susannah*, Act 2, scene 3

Susannah – Meredith Mecum

Olin Blitch – Scott Russell

Verdi - *La Traviata*, Act 2

Alfredo – Michael Papincak

Annina – Raehann Bryce-Davis

Violetta – Toni Marie Palmertree

Giuseppe – Scott Russell

Germont – Sol Jin

Wagner - *Die Walküre*, Act 2, scene 4

Brünnhilde – Meredith Mecum

Siegmond – Michael Papincak

Verdi - *Don Carlo*, Act 4, parte prima

Filippo – Ming Zhao

Il Grande Inquisitore – Scott Russell

Elisabetta – Toni Marie Palmertree

Eboli – Raehann Bryce-Davis

Rodrigo – Sol Jin

TICKETS: \$40/\$25/\$15 for students with ID. Tickets may be purchased by calling the San Francisco Opera Box Office at (415) 864-3330. The box office is open Monday, 10 am to 5 pm and Tuesday through Friday, 10 am to 6 pm.

Saturday, July 11 at 2 pm

Yerba Buena Gardens, 773 Mission St. between 3rd and 4th Streets, San Francisco

Merola Opera Program: **Schwabacher Summer Concert**

FREE outdoor concert

Program repeated from above

Thursday, July 23 at 7:30 pm and Saturday, July 25 at 2 pm

Cowell Theater, Fort Mason Center, San Francisco

Merola Opera Program: ***The Medium* (by Gian Carlo Menotti) and *Gianni Schicchi* (by Giacomo Puccini)**

Mark Morash - conductor

Peter Kazaras - director

The Medium (Gian Carlo Menotti)

Monica - Madison Leonard
Toby - Alasdair Kent
Madame Flora (Baba) - Nicole Woodward
Mrs. Gobineau - Kathryn Bowden
Mr. Gobineau - Austin Siebert
Mrs. Nolan - Ashley Dixon
Gianni Schicchi (Giacomo Puccini)
Gianni Schicchi - Kihun Yoon
Lauretta - Cree Carrico
Zita - Tara Curtis
Rinuccio - Christopher Bozeka
Gherardo - Alasdair Kent
Nella - Kathryn Bowden
Betto - Brad Walker
Simone - Zachary Elmassian
Marco - Austin Siebert
Ciesca - Ashley Dixon
Spinelloccio - Sol Jin
Amantio di Nicolao - Scott Russell
Pinellino - Ming Zhao
Guccio - Sol Jin

Double bill: Two one-hour operas, sung in English and Italian, respectively, with English supertitles. In *The Medium*, a séance goes terribly awry when a pseudo-seer and a mute boy get involved. The one-act comic opera *Gianni Schicchi* explores the grimly humorous and divisive greed that emerges on the death of a relative.

TICKETS: \$65/\$45/\$15 for students with ID. Tickets may be purchased by calling the San Francisco Opera Box Office at (415) 864-3330. The box office is open Monday, 10 am to 5 pm and Tuesday through Friday, 10 am to 6 pm.

Thursday, August 6 at 7:30 pm and Saturday, August 8 at 2 pm

Cowell Theater, Fort Mason Center, San Francisco

Merola Opera Program: **Don Pasquale by Gaetano Donizetti**

(sung in Italian with English supertitles)

Warren Jones - conductor

Nic Muni - director

Norina - Amina Edris, soprano

Pasquale – James Ioelu, bass-baritone

Ernesto – Soonchan Kwon, tenor

Malatesta – Alex DeSocio, baritone

Ulises Alcalá - costume design

Donald Eastman - scenery design

True love wins when the old skinflint Pasquale tries to force his nephew to marry for money -- and gets a lesson he'll never forget.

TICKETS: \$65/\$45/\$15 for students with ID. Tickets may be purchased by calling the San Francisco Opera Box Office at (415) 864-3330. The box office is open Monday, 10 am to 5 pm and Tuesday through Friday, 10 am to 6 pm.

Saturday, August 22 at 7:30 pm

War Memorial Opera House, 300 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco

Merola Opera Program: **Merola Grand Finale and Reception**

Conductor – Antony Walker

Director – Mo Zhou

Program and casting to be announced. Post-performance reception (10 pm) with the artists, Opera House Lower Level Café.

TICKETS: \$45 Grand Tier and Orchestra Premium/\$35 Orchestra and Grand Tier/\$25 Dress Circle/\$15 Students with ID. Tickets may be purchased by calling the San Francisco Opera Box Office at (415) 864-3330. The box office is open Monday, 10 am to 5 pm and Tuesday through Friday, 10 am to 6 pm. Post-performance reception tickets: \$50. For reception tickets, please call the San Francisco Opera Box Office at (415) 864-3330.

MEDIA INQUIRIES

For media inquiries, please contact Rachel Krasner, Merola Opera Program Marketing and Events Associate, at rkrasner@sfopera.com or (415) 551-6299.