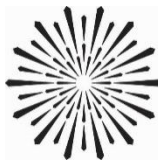


SAN FRANCISCO
OPERA CENTER

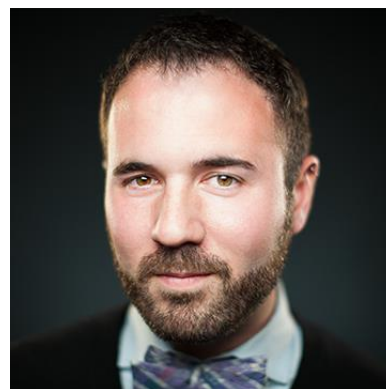


MEROLA
OPERA PROGRAM

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA CENTER AND MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM PRESENT
SECOND SCHWABACHER RECITAL ON MARCH 4, 2020

NEW LINEUP FEATURES MEZZO-SOPRANO SIMONE MCINTOSH,
TENOR ZHENGYI BAI AND PIANIST ROBERT MOLLICONE

Tickets available at sfopera.com/srs and (415) 864-3330



(From left to right: mezzo-soprano Simone McIntosh, tenor Zhengyi Bai, pianist Robert Mollicone)

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (February 3, 2020) — The 37th Schwabacher Recital Series continues on Wednesday, March 4, with its second performance of 2020. San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows **Simone McIntosh** and **Zhengyi Bai** take the stage at San Francisco's Dianne and Tad Taube Atrium Theater for a musical exploration of love and heartbreak, accompanied by **Robert Mollicone** on the piano.

Their program will spotlight a rarely performed classical masterpiece, Olivier Messiaen's *Harawi*, as well as Richard Strauss' beloved Opus 27, a collection of four songs published in 1894. Both *Harawi* and Opus 27 will be performed in their entirety, alongside selections from Vincenzo Bellini's *Sei Ariette da Camera*.

This recital is an on-stage reunion for McIntosh, a mezzo-soprano, and Bai, a tenor, following their heralded duet in last year's *The Future Is Now* concert. In its review, the *San Francisco Chronicle* praised the pair for the "charming verve" they brought to the stage.

Bai steps in for first-year Adler Fellow Timothy Murray, a baritone originally scheduled to take part in the March 4 recital. Murray has withdrawn to participate in the semifinals of the Glyndebourne Opera Cup, but he remains slated to participate in the 2020 Schwabacher series finale on April 22.

McIntosh, who hails from Vancouver, Canada, will tackle Messiaen's *Harawi*, a work she first encountered at Against the Grain Theatre in a 2015 performance by mezzo-soprano Krisztina Szabó. The

experience was so powerful that McIntosh explains she became “enamored” by the song cycle’s intense, unvarnished emotions. “Once I began learning and researching the piece, my love very quickly turned into an obsession,” she says.

Messiaen composed the 50-minute song cycle in 1945, at a time of personal tragedy. By the end of World War II, the health of his wife, composer and violinist Claire Delbos, had begun to decline, leading to her premature death in 1959. The theme of love lost is evident in *Harawi*’s subtitle: *Chant d’amour et de mort, or Song of Love and Death*.

Named for a genre of pre-Hispanic Andean folk music that likewise often dealt with tragic love, *Harawi* marks the start of Messiaen’s “Tristan Trilogy,” completed in 1948. Named for the legend of Tristan and Iseult, this trilogy includes Messiaen’s *Turangalila-Symphonie* and the choral work *Cinq Rechants*.

Harawi tells the story of Piroutcha and her lover, a couple separated by — and reunited in — death. Employing surrealistic techniques, Messiaen himself wrote the words to *Harawi*, interspersing onomatopoeia inspired by the indigenous Quechua language into his French lyrics.

McIntosh, now in her second year as an Adler Fellow, recently performed on the San Francisco Opera stage as a Wood Nymph in June 2019’s *Rusalka*. She was a 2018 participant in the Merola Opera Program. In addition to winning the Canadian Opera Company’s 2016 Ensemble Studio Competition, McIntosh was named one of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s (CBC) “30 hot Canadian classical musicians under 30” in 2017. In 2019, she starred in the title role of Vancouver Opera’s *La Cenerentola*. The *Vancouver Sun* praised her performance, saying she “wins over the audience with sheer vocal agility and a lovely rich sound.”

Bai, who joins McIntosh for a second year in the Adler Fellowship, is also a graduate of the 2018 Merola Opera Program. He recently appeared on San Francisco Opera’s mainstage in June 2019’s *Carmen*, as the smuggler Remendado, as well as in November 2019’s *Manon Lescaut*, where he appeared as both the Lamplighter and Dancing Master.

Originally from Linyi, China, Bai will be performing Strauss’ Opus 27, a set of four songs composed in 1894. They include some of the composer’s most celebrated lieder: “Ruhe, Meine Seele” (“Rest, My Soul”), “Cäcilie” (“Cecilia”), “Heimliche Aufforderung” (“The Secret Invitation”) and “Morgen!” (“Tomorrow!”). Each song is set to the words of a German poem: one from Heinrich Hart, another from Karl Henckell and two by John Henry Mackay.

Bai will also perform selections from Bellini’s *Sei Ariette da Camera* (“Six Little Salon Arias”), a set of flowing bel canto pieces. Originally, Bai got his start as a solo pianist — playing works primarily by Franz Liszt and Frédéric Chopin, as well as German lieder and Chinese art songs — before switching his focus to singing. Those years behind the piano, however, proved formative for the tenor: “All those experiences made me really sensitive to music,” Bai says. “Of course, it helps me learn music really fast.”

He considers Strauss’ Opus 27 one of his favorite song sets to perform. “It’s romantic, poetic, sincere and beautiful,” he explains. “It is also very easy for the audience to understand. Once the music starts, the audience immediately senses Strauss’ storytelling.”

Bai won accolades for his 2018 performance of the title character in Mozart’s *Il Re Pastore*, with the *San Francisco Chronicle* remarking on his “radiant, fresh-toned singing and technical bravura” in the Merola

Opera Program's production. McIntosh was his co-star then too. "Simone and I worked together a lot," Bai says. "I enjoy her passion for performing."

Hailing from East Greenwich, Rhode Island, Robert Mollicone joins the singers on stage with accompaniment on the piano. A member of San Francisco Opera's music staff, Mollicone has provided musical preparation for a variety of mainstage productions including the 2016 world premiere of Bright Sheng's *Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2018's *Siegfried* and 2019's *Billy Budd*. He conducted the San Francisco Opera Orchestra for 2017's holiday concert *Christmas with Sol3 Mio*, as well as for the annual *Opera in the Park* concert.

Mollicone is himself a graduate of the 2011 Merola Opera Program and a two-time Adler Fellow in 2012 and 2013. He brings a wealth of experience collaborating on the concert stage with some of opera's top artists, including Denyce Graves, Simon Estes, Ailyn Pérez and Jamie Barton.

Founded in 1983, the Schwabacher Recital Series highlights up-and-coming international stars, providing a platform for them to showcase their passion and artistry. The annual four-part series concludes with two more unique performances after March 4: one on April 1 and the finale on April 22.

TICKETS AND INFORMATION

All recitals take place at 7:30 p.m. at the Dianne and Tad Taube Atrium Theater, a state-of-the-art performance venue utilizing the Constellation® acoustic system from Berkeley-based Meyer Sound.

The Taube Atrium Theater is part of San Francisco Opera's Diane B. Wilsey Center for Opera, located on the fourth floor of the Veterans Building at 401 Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco.

Tickets for general seating are \$30. Tickets can be purchased at the San Francisco Opera Box Office (301 Van Ness Avenue) in person, by phone at (415) 864-3330, and online at sfopera.com/srs. Please note: The four-recital package is available only in-person or by phone. Student rush tickets, subject to availability, are available for \$15 at the Taube Atrium Theater 30 minutes prior to each recital. (Limit of two tickets per person; valid ID is required.) Artists, programs, schedules and ticket prices are subject to change.

The Schwabacher Recital Series is endowed in perpetuity by the generosity of the late James Schwabacher and is sponsored in part by the Merola Opera Program. A celebrated Bay Area singer, recitalist, scholar and teacher, James Schwabacher was a co-founder of the Merola Opera Program.

Yamaha is the official piano of San Francisco Opera. Pianos are generously provided by Piedmont Piano Company.

MARCH 4 SCHWABACHER RECITAL

Presented by San Francisco Opera Center and Merola Opera Program

Recitals take place in the Dianne and Tad Taube Atrium Theater
Veterans Building, fourth floor, 401 Van Ness Ave, San Francisco, CA 94102

Artists and programs subject to change.

Wednesday, March 4, at 7:30 p.m.

Simone McIntosh, mezzo-soprano

Zhengyi Bai, tenor

Robert Mollicone, pianist

PROGRAM includes:

- Olivier Messiaen — *Harawi*
- Richard Strauss — Opus 27 (4 Leider)
- Vincenzo Bellini — *Sei Ariette da Camera*

ABOUT SAN FRANCISCO OPERA CENTER AND MEROLA OPERA PROGRAM

San Francisco Opera Center was created in 1982 by then-General Director Terence A. McEwen to oversee the operation and administration of the education and training programs initiated by Kurt Herbert Adler in 1954.

Providing a coordinated sequence of performance and study opportunities for young artists, San Francisco Opera Center represents a new era in which young artists of major operatic potential can develop through intensive training and performance, under the aegis of a major international opera company.

Under the guidance of San Francisco Opera Center Director **Sheri Greenawald**, with support from San Francisco Opera General Director **Matthew Shilvock**, the Opera Center has trained and introduced many young stars from around the world to the international opera stage through its resident artist programs.

Initially founded as the San Francisco Opera/Affiliate Artists program in 1975, the **Adler Fellowship Program** is one of the nation's most prestigious performance-oriented residencies for the most advanced young singers and pianists.

Each year, Adler Fellows are sponsored by individual donors and institutional funders to help cover the cost of their fellowship, and sponsors affiliated with the Adler Program have the opportunity to attend private studio classes with the Fellows and develop nurturing relationships with them.

Alumni from the Adler Fellowship Program include sopranos Jane Archibald, Susannah Biller, Leah Crocetto, Heidi Melton, Melody Moore, Patricia Racette, Nadine Sierra, Ruth Ann Swenson, Elza van den Heever and Deborah Voigt; mezzo-sopranos Zheng Cao, Kendall Gladen, Daveda Karanas, Maya Lahyani, Daniela Mack, Renée Tatum and Dolora Zajick; countertenors Brian Asawa, Ryan Belongie and Gerald Thompson; tenors Andrew Bidlack, Brian Jagde, Daniel Montenegro, Matthew O'Neill, Sean Panikkar,

Alek Shrader and Noah Stewart; baritones Eugene Brancoveanu, Alfredo Daza, Mark Delavan, Austin Kness, Lucas Meachem and James Westman; bass-baritones Joshua Bloom, Ryan Kuster, John Relyea, Philip Skinner, Daniel Sumegi and Dale Travis; and basses John Ames and Kenneth Kellogg.

The Merola Opera Program is widely regarded as the foremost opera training program for aspiring singers, coach accompanists and stage directors. Merola nurtures the opera stars of tomorrow, presents operatic works that reach a diverse audience and provides community outreach through education programs for students and the general public.

Every summer the program offers 29 young artists the rare opportunity of studying, coaching and participating in master classes with established professionals for twelve weeks. Participants also perform in two complete opera productions with orchestra and two summer concerts.

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.

Merola has served as a proving ground for hundreds of artists including Anna Netrebko, Ailyn Pérez, Patricia Racette, Nadine Sierra, Elza van den Heever, Carol Vaness, Deborah Voigt, Joyce DiDonato, Susan Graham, Dolora Zajick, Brian Jagde, Stuart Skelton, Rolando Villazón, Thomas Hampson, Lucas Meachem, Quinn Kelsey and Patrick Summers, among many others.

The Merola Opera Program is a financially independent organization with a separate 501(c)3 which operates in close collaboration with the San Francisco Opera Center and San Francisco Opera. In addition, only Merola graduates are considered for participation in the San Francisco Opera's Adler Fellowship program.

Since 2015, Merola Opera Program has been the sole sponsor of three of the four annual Schwabacher Recitals.

For more information on the San Francisco Opera Center, Adler Fellowship and the Merola Opera Program, visit sfopera.com and merola.org.

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To obtain further press information, including artist headshots, please visit sfopera.com/press or contact:

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