

Media Release: Elizabeth Connell Prize

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2021 Elizabeth Connell Prize Winners Announced

Entrants from thirty-three countries entered this year's online Elizabeth Connell Prize International Singing Competition.

Open to sopranos and mezzo sopranos aged 25-34 of all nationalities.

Due to Covid-19 the 2020 and 2021 live competitions were cancelled. In 2021 the Elizabeth Connell Prize Trustees decided to hold the competition online and award cash grants to emerging young female singers who show the potential to sing the more dramatic repertoire, and who had lost work due to the pandemic, highlighting the impact the pandemic has had on the arts sector.

Each entrant provided three video links, their CV and a statement explaining how the pandemic had affected them. The jury consisted of Maestro Richard Bonyngé AC CBE, Welsh Wagnerian dramatic soprano Dame Anne Evans DBE, Australian dramatic mezzo soprano Bernadette Cullen and Fiona Janes, former mezzo soprano and one of the competitions trustees.

The late South African dramatic soprano, Elizabeth Connell, left a \$1million legacy to help find and support the next generation of female dramatic singers. Established in 2014, the competition has supported thirty international singers and awarded \$255,000 since its inception.

The competition is run under the umbrella of the Joan Sutherland & Richard Bonyngé Foundation and is usually held in Sydney in conjunction with the Foundation's Bel Canto Award. Covid-19 and border closures have prevented the live competitions from taking place.

In 2021 the total prize money awarded will be \$69,000 to eight singers from England, the Russian Federation, Norway, Australia, Germany, Canada and South Africa.

2021 WINNERS

OKSANA SEKERINA (34) soprano from the Russian Federation Oksana is the winner of numerous competitions including the prestigious Birgit Nilsson Prize in Plácido Domingo's Operalia Competition. She has lost performances of Tosca in Munich and Romania, the Countess in *Le nozze di Figaro* in Basel, Micaela in *Carmen* in Santiago and Amelia in *Simon Boccanegra* in Romania to Covid-19. She will sing Tosca in Kassel, Germany later in 2021, Mimi and Desdemona in Santiago, Tosca at the Gaertnerplatz in Munich in 2022 and Elisabetta in Don Carlos in 2023. **\$10,000 grant**

SIGRID BØE (32) soprano from Norway Trained in Sweden, despite losing performances of Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, Pamina in *The Magic Flute* and Sylva Varescu in *The Gypsy Princess* to covid-19, all have been rescheduled over the coming years plus a new Mimi in *La bohème*. She recently performed the Pamina in Norway and will sing Helena for Malmö Opera later this year. **\$10,000 grant**

LAUREN FAGAN (33) soprano from Australia A former member of the ROH Covent Garden Jette Parker Young Artists Programme, Lauren had performances cancelled at the ROH Covent Garden, Bergen National Opera, Bordeaux Opera and Lille Opera during the pandemic. She has sung in 2021 Giulietta in *The Tales of Hoffmann* for Zurich Opera, Violetta in *La traviata* for Holland Park and Norma in the *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* in Munich which she will sing in Paris. She will perform Helena at the Glyndebourne Festival in 2022 and Gretel for the ROH Covent Garden in 2023. **\$10,000 grant**

LEAH GUNTER (29) soprano from South Africa Leah has a Masters from Cape Town University and like many has had performances cancelled due to covid-19 including *L'elisir d'amore* at the Artscape Opera House, Sieglinde for the Pretoria Symphony and her place in the semi-final of the Concorso Lirico Internazionale Ottavio Ziino Opera Competition in Rome in 2021 as requested by Dominique Meyer, the GM of La Scala. **\$9,000 grant**

CLAIRE BARNETT-JONES (31) mezzo soprano from England Claire was a recent finalist in the 2021 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World where she received the Joan Sutherland Audience Prize. Winner of a Wagner Prize from the Netherlands, covid-19 has cancelled her performances of *Rusalka*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Madama Butterfly* at English National Opera and more. She stood in at short notice for Baba in *The Medium* for Frankfurt Oper and will sing Rosswise in *Die Walküre* and cover Fricka in *Die Walküre* for ENO in 2021. **\$8,000 grant**

NINA-MARIA FISCHER (33) soprano from Germany Nina-Maria has performed extensively, most recently Leonora in *Il trovatore* and Dido in Theater Vorpommern where is a member of the company. She will sing Mariana in Wagner's *Das Liebesverbot* for Oper Leipzig. Covid-19 saw her lose several concerts and performances of the Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier* and the title role in *The Merry Widow* in 2020. **\$8,000 grant**

MIKAYLA SAGER (30) soprano from Canada Mikayla is member of the San Francisco Merola Young Artists Programme where she will sing Countess in *Le nozze di Figaro*. She will also perform Lauretta in *Gianna Schicchi* for the Festival Napa Valley and take part in the Finals of the prestigious Tenor Viñas International Competition in Spain which has been postponed to 2022 due to the pandemic. **\$7,000 grant**

YULIA SHAVARINA (29) contralto from Russian Federation Based in Moscow, Yulia has a Masters from the Russian Academy of Theatrical Arts and has been a member of the Bolshoi Opera's Young Artists Programme between 2018-2021. **\$7,000 grant**

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