

Press Release

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Soprano Soraya Mafi wins 2016 Chilcott Award for Singers

£10,000 award to support a 'major young artist with the potential to make an international impact'



28-year-old soprano **Soraya Mafi** has been awarded the £10,000 Chilcott Award for young British opera singers.

The Award is offered by the Susan Chilcott Scholarship, an independent charity set up in 2005 in memory of Susan Chilcott, one of the outstanding singers of her generation, who died from cancer in 2003 aged 40.

The Chilcott Award is offered biennially to an opera singer between the ages of 23 and 33 who, like Susan Chilcott herself, has the potential to make an international impact within the world of opera. The Award is specifically designed to enable advanced training or career development. This year, 59 young singers applied for the Chilcott Award.

Soraya Mafi is currently a Harewood Young Artist at English National Opera, this season singing Papagena in Simon McBurney's *The Magic Flute*, and most recently Karolka in David Alden's production of *Jenufa*. She will sing the role of Despina in *Così fan tutte* with West Green House Opera from 30 July. Soraya will use her award to fund ongoing singing lessons with her teacher, Janis Kelly, language tuition, performance coaching as well as to support travel/audition and promotional costs. www.sorayamafi.co.uk

The award was made by a distinguished jury, chaired by pianist and close friend of Susan Chilcott, **Iain Burnside** and featuring Chilcott Scholarship Trustees, soprano **Dame Josephine Barstow**, international voice coach, **Lady Pappano**, **Pamela Bullock**, bass baritone, **Neal Davies**, **Ian Rosenblatt**, Founder of the Rosenblatt Recital Series and RPS Council Member and **John Gilhooly**, Director of Wigmore Hall and Chairman of the Royal Philharmonic Society. They were joined by **Camille De Rijck**, Producer at Cypres Records, radio host and producer and owner of Forumopera.com, **David Sigall**, Director of Ingpen and Williams, and **Eva Kleinitz**, Opera Director, Stuttgart Opera and President of Opera Europa.

Iain Burnside comments: *"It is a pleasure and privilege to listen to the young singers selected to audition for the Chilcott Award. Soraya lit up the audition room with her voice, her artistry and her engaging personality. There is an integrity to her singing that struck a chord in all of us. We hope the Chilcott Award will enrich her artistic development, helping her on her journey to a very bright future".*

Previous winners of the Chilcott Award are Duncan Rock (2012) and Clare Presland (2014).

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About Soraya Mafi

Lancashire-born soprano Soraya Mafi studied at the Royal Northern College of Music with Sandra Dugdale (supported by Selfridges) and Royal College of Music with Janis Kelly, (supported by the Help Musicians UK Sybil Tutton Award and The Countess of Munster). Soraya continues her studies with renowned soprano Janis Kelly and coach David Harper. Soraya's many awards and prizes include the Royal Overseas League 2015, the Maggie Teyte Prize 2014, an Independent Opera Award and 2nd Prize in the 2015 Kathleen Ferrier Awards. Soraya is a Harewood Young Artist of the English National Opera supported by The Bruce Tollis Fellowship.

During her time at RCM, Soraya performed the roles of Virtu in James Conway's production of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Le Feu and Le Rossignol in James Bonas' production of *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* and the title role in *Arianna in Creta* for The London Handel Festival conducted by Laurence Cummings. Soraya created the role of Cheryl in Iain Burnside's new music theatre piece *Journeying Boys* and made her début appearances for the Grange Park Opera, as Constance in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, and Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, as *Aminta in Il Re Pastore*.

Concert highlights include *Les Illuminations* and *Messiah* at The Royal Festival Hall, Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man* with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and Mozart's *Goose of Cairo* with the London Mozart Players conducted by David Parry; and in recital for the Buxton Festival, the Royal Opera House Crush Room and with Graham Johnson at the Middle Temple Hall.

In 2015/16 season, Soraya made her debut for the Welsh National Opera as Johanna in *Sweeney Todd* and returned to the English National Opera for *The Magic Flute* and *Jenufa*. She will also make her role début as Despina for West Green House Opera.

2016/17 season sees Soraya making her Opera North début, performances with The Scottish Chamber Orchestra under Peter Dijkstra, a tour of Viennese Concerts with The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and performances throughout France with Jean-Christophe Spinosi and his orchestra Ensemble Matheus. She will make role débuts as Mabel in Mike Leigh's production of *The Pirates of Penzance* for ENO and as Yum-Yum in Jonathan Miller's production of *The Mikado* for ENO at The Winter Gardens, Blackpool. Soraya will also make her opera recording début with the BBC Concert Orchestra.

