



## The Pride of Ireland

### Wigmore Hall presents gala concert by the highest ranking prize-winners from the 2010 Veronica Dunne International Singing Competition

One of Ireland's greatest authorities on singing and three winners of the competition that bears her name come to London on 18 February 2012 when Wigmore Hall plays host to the top laureates of the Sixth Veronica Dunne International Singing Competition. The showcase concert celebrates the lifelong achievements of Veronica Dunne, universally known as 'Ronnie', and her signal contribution to the development of fine singing in her home country. It also offers a platform for the abundant talents of sopranos Pumeza Matshikiza and Sarah-Jane Brandon, both from South Africa, and the Irish tenor Dean Power. Their work will be supported by Ireland's foremost song accompanists, Dearbhla Collins and Mairead Hurley.

Veronica Dunne, born in Dublin in 1927, received childhood singing lessons from a former pupil of Jean de Reszke, the eminent and eloquent Polish tenor. She was raised in the art of bel canto, captured Irish hearts in her late teens with beguiling performances of Puccini's 'O mio babbino caro', and progressed to become a national treasure. Ronnie Dunne travelled to study in Rome in 1946 and was supported there by Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty, known as the 'Scarlet Pimpernel of the Vatican' thanks to his wartime work to protect Allied troops and Jews from capture by the Nazis. Sixty years ago, Dunne raced from Ireland's west coast at short notice to compete in and win the prestigious Concorso Lirico Milano. She became a regular member of the post-war Royal Opera company, where she sang Susanna to Joan Sutherland's Countess and Euridice to Kathleen Ferrier's Orfeo. In 1958 she performed the role of Blanche in the UK premiere of Poulenc's *Les Dialogues des Carmélites*. After she married and became a mother, Dunne made a decisive move into teaching. Today, at the age of 84, she remains as active as ever as a member of the teaching faculty at the Royal Irish Academy of Music. She established the Veronica Dunne International Singing Competition in 1995 as a triennial event designed to advance her mission of inspiring and encouraging young opera singers in the early stages of their careers.

"The Competition has grown from and built on strong foundations," comments its Artistic Administrator, Dearbhla Collins. "We aim to stand on the world stage as one of the major competitions for young singers. As a pianist and vocal coach at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, I have a passionate interest in song and am delighted to see the Veronica Dunne International Singing Competition achieving the same global prominence as the Dublin International Piano Competition. We want to show the quality of our singers to the Wigmore Hall audience, give these terrific young performers a boost and attract people to Dublin for our next Competition." Past prizewinners, she notes, include the sopranos Orla Boylan, Norah Ansellem and Mari Moriya, mezzo-soprano Tara Erraught and tenor Simon O'Neill. "Our future vision is about putting Dublin on the map as a destination for the world's finest young singers. We also offer a platform to Irish singers to show our international jury and audiences what they are able to do."

While opera rests at the heart of the Veronica Dunne International Singing Competition, its finalists are expected to perform German Lied, art song and concert arias by Mozart. The Competition's broad repertoire mix and unrivalled Irish hospitality, essential to the event's unique character, served to attract 103 applicants in 2010. Around seventy singers were chosen to contest the first round, with twenty-four, twelve and six progressing respectively to the quarter-final, semi-final and final rounds. The next Competition is scheduled to take place in January 2013, with Richard Bonyngé and David Agler, Artistic Director of Wexford Festival Opera already confirmed as members of the jury. The distinguished roll-call of past Dunne Competition juries includes Ileana Cotrubas; Sergei Leiferkus; Marie McLaughlin; Steven Naylor, Director of Artistic Administration at Glyndebourne and Christian Carlstedt, Casting Director, Bavarian State Opera.

"Ireland has produced so many fine singers, remarkable when you think about the size of our population," notes Dearbhla Collins. "Think of Patricia Bardon, Ann Murray, Orla Boylan, who won the first Veronica Dunne Competition in 1992, and rising stars like Tara Erraught. It is very important for Ireland now to be seen internationally as a strong force in culture. Taking the Veronica Dunne International Singing Competition to Wigmore Hall belongs to that process. We've received the greatest possible support from the Hall's Director,

John Gilhooly, and I am delighted that our top three laureates from 2010 are able to be part of this special occasion.”

Lyric soprano Pumeza Matshikiza, who grew up in a musical family in the townships of apartheid-era Cape Town, secured first prize in the Dunne Competition with strikingly individual performances of ‘Come scoglio’ from Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, ‘Signore, ascolta!’ from Puccini’s *Turandot* and Dvořák’s ‘Song to the Moon’ from *Rusalka*. “The competition wasn’t easy,” she recalls. “I sang thirteen items for all rounds; the third was a killer. I didn’t think of it as a competition but as a concert or a recital.” Matshikiza made her Wigmore Hall debut in company with 2009 Kathleen Ferrier Award winner Sarah-Jane Brandon and the Classical Opera Company in May 2010. Dean Power is a member of the opera studio at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich. This will be his debut at Wigmore Hall.

“Our winners have prepared a fascinating programme of songs, arias and duets,” observes Dearbhla Collins. “It’s wonderful that Ronnie Dunne’s influence, still so strong and vital, is going to reach Wigmore Hall’s deeply knowledgeable audience.”

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