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##### Press Release

14 November, 2024

**SCOTTISH OPERA LAUNCHES FREE VOCAL EDUCATION RESOURCE**

***THE SMALL MAGICIAN***

On 18 November, Scottish Opera is launching a new, trauma-aware, inclusive, accessible vocal education resource, created by Education Artist in Residence, **Lea Shaw**, entitled *The Small Magician*, which enables participants to healthily challenge and build their vocal technique and knowledge from the comfort of their own home or chosen space.

The launch coincides with National Self-Care week, which runs from 18-24 November and isan annual awareness week that focuses on embedding support for self-care across communities, families and generations, with this year’s theme being ‘Mind & Body’.

Lea isan award-winning Black/BIPOC mezzo-soprano from Colorado, who lives and works in Scotland. A Scottish Opera Emerging and Associate Artist since 2021, she has performed in many recent Company productions including *Ainadamar*, *Il trittico* and *Opera Highlights*.

With *The Small Magician,* Lea aims to empower participants to embrace their voices (both singing and speaking) and practice, as part of a wider sense of well-being and an awareness of mental and physical health. The guidance draws on classic pedagogy, scientific research, and Yoga and embodiment practices, and Lea has created a series of short videos, audio guides and workbooks covering breath-work, texture, diction, intonation, pattern, embodiment, and recovery which can be accessed for no charge on Scottish Opera’s website. Designed to be a safe place to explore and foster curiosity, *The Small Magician* puts emphasis on engaging with the voice as a form of play, with every voice being valid.

The written resources are presented in PDF form so that they are easily accessible and printable if desired, whilst contents come in a digestible quantity of exercises, with the time needed to work through a session being flexible.

Lea also designed the resources using trauma aware and responsive principles, understanding that anyone coming to the project, either as a facilitator or as a participant, will have their own complex history. That history does not have to be shared with anyone to be valid, and the impacts they feel do not need to be justified.

Knowing this, the language of the project is open, encouraging, and positive, and there is a large emphasis placed on participants' personal sovereignty, autonomy, and intuitive practice. By being aware of all of this, *The Small Magician* can respond to the needs of participants by providing tools that can be of use, and by having a clear practice of open, non-judgemental communication, creating resources in direct response to these needs as they are shared.

Lea is currently working on more resources that are still in the research and development stage and will be added to *The Small Magician* in the near future, including workbooks for changing voices (transitioning voices, and for menopausal and menstruating people), lesson plans for teachers, warm-up books for choirs and in-person workshops.

**Lea Shaw** said: ‘I gave *The Small Magician* this title as it originated with the idea that working with the voice and its relationship with the brain and body is indeed, magical!

‘It has always been important to me to feel part of something bigger, and to make others feel welcome in whatever space I'm in, in whatever way I can. Working with my voice has given me so much: a passion to share with others, a home within myself, and a community that gives me confidence and context. I know how crucial it is to have a positive working relationship with your voice, both artistically and in life as a whole.

‘*The Small Magician* is my way of opening my practise outward, and creating a support net and toolbox for anyone who wants to explore their voice: those who are be right at the beginning of their vocal learning, those who want to engage with their voice in a holistic way, or those who may not know where to start.

‘While many desire to engage with voice-work, they may not always feel that it is accessible to them. This can be due to the cost of accessing lessons or resources, a fear of an unfamiliar person critiquing a very vulnerable part of themselves, other accessibility needs that are not considered, or because of the events that led them to feeling voiceless from the outset: harsh words from authority figures or friends, their right to personal autonomy and consent being denied. Their wishes and needs being disregarded or ridiculed, or anything else. Because our voices are so linked to our internal landscape and our mental wellbeing, it is important to me that this project is as safe a space as possible in approach and method.

‘My wish is that you feel empowered to use your voice as an extension of your authentic self, and to revel in the small magic that makes you, and your voice, unique.’

**Jane Davidson** MBE, Director of Outreach and Education at Scottish Opera said: ‘Lea’s beautiful and empathetic programme aligns perfectly with a key objective that underpins much of the past 50 years of our work with schools and communities; namely, to encourage people of all ages to learn about the unique relationship between their voice and their sense of ‘self’.

‘We use the phrase ‘to have a voice’ in everyday conversation, but what does that really mean? Our voices are one of the most precious ways in which we can express ourselves – through the spoken word and through song, as individuals and as a group. Regular singing can ground us and help us to feel more at ease with ourselves, and others. Learning to use *The Small Magician’s* simple vocal, physical and mindfulness techniques is a wonderful way to help us negotiate the sometimes complex world we live in.’

More information about *The Small Magician* is available from 18 November [www.scottishopera.org.uk/the-small-magician/](http://www.scottishopera.org.uk/the-small-magician/)

To find out more about National Self Care Week visit [www.selfcareforum.org/events/self-care-week/](http://www.selfcareforum.org/events/self-care-week/)

[www.scottishopera.org.uk](http://www.scottishopera.org.uk/)

You can follow Scottish Opera on X, Facebook, Instagram and Tik-Tok @ScottishOpera

to Editors

**Lea Shaw biography**

Lea Shaw is an award-winning Black/BIPOC Mezzo-soprano from Colorado. She now lives and works in Scotland as an Emerging Artist for Scottish Opera. An alumnus of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, she received her BMus with Distinction of the First Class, a Masters of Music, and a Masters of Opera from the Alexander Gibson Opera School, with the guidance of Helen Lawson, Susan Bullock, and Rachel Nicholls.

An accomplished soloist in opera, concert and improvisation, she has performed both locally and worldwide with repertoire spanning from Handel and Bach’s oratorios and operas and the works of Mozart, Rossini, Purcell, Strauss, and Humperdinck, to the works of Britten, Korngold, Bernstein, Vaughan Williams, Ravel, Turnage, Eastman, and Schoenberg’s Pierrot Lunaire and Maxwell Davies’ The Medium. She has worked with Marin Alsop, Martyn Brabbins, John Butt, Sir Andrew Davies, Sir Thomas Allen, and Dame Janet Baker, and has created works with Stuart Macrae and James Macmillan in close collaboration.

Throughout her time at the Alexander Gibson Opera School she performed the roles of Second Witch (Dido and Aneas), Bianca (The Rape of Lucretia), Polly Peachum (Die Dreigroschenoper), Mère Jéanne (Les Dialogues des Carmélites), and prepared the roles of Sesto (Giulio Cesare in Egitto), Minskwoman (Flight) and L’Enfant (L’Enfant et les Sortilèges). As a chorus member, Lea’s repertoire includes Sir John In Love, The Rake’s Progress (Edinburgh International Festival), Hansel and Gretel (St. Magnus International Festival) Die Fledermaus, Street Scene, Dido and Aneas, The Fiery Angel (Scottish Opera), Elektra, Salome, and Götterdämmerung (EIF). In scenes, her roles include Fidalma (Il Marito Segredo) Third Maiden (Elektra), Dorabella (Cosi fan Tutti) Idiamante (Idomeneo), Olga (Eugene Onegin) Tisbe (La Cenerentola) Madame Popova (The Bear), Isabella (L’Italiana in Algeri), and Dorothée (Cendrillon). She has covered the roles of Emma Jones (Street Scene) and Dido (Dido and Aneas).

 As one of Scottish Opera's Emerging Artists 2021-23, then Associate artist 2023-24, she travelled Scotland with their Opera Highlights tour (Autumn 2021, Spring 2024), and appeared on the main stage as Hermia (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) The Neighbour (*Mavra*), Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*), Paquette (*Candide*), Niña (*Ainadamar*), Suor Zelatrice (*Suor Angelica*), Mercedes (*Carmen*), and Flora (*La traviata*). She is Scottish Opera's Education Artist in Residence this season. ​

Lea has appeared as a masterclass participant under Thomas Quastoff, Dame Janet Baker, Roger Vignoles, Nicky Spence, Susan Bullock, and Giselle Allan, and as soloist in Serenade To Music (Vaughan Williams) at the 2017 Leeds Lieder Festival. She has also performed works by Graham Haire at the 2017 ANIMUSIC Congress in Porto, Portugal. She is a recurring soloist in concert and oratorio, both in classical and baroque and in more contemporary works, having performed as soloist in the English premier of Erwin Schulloff's lost oratorio of the Communist Manifesto with the University of Glasgow in April 2018, soloist in Duke Ellington's Sacred Service as part of the 2017 West End Festival, the Chichester Psalms (EIF), and as featured soloist in Handel’s Messiah, the Bach Magnificat, and Haydn’s Nelson Mass across the UK. She has also performed as a soloist in recurring relationships with the Red Note Ensemble, the Ye Cronies Opera Society, the St. Magnus Festival, the Westbourne Music Series, Amnesty International, and has performed concerts with the Head of Opera, as well as the Principal, of the RCS. She has performed for the Royal Family.

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Lea’s awards include the Jean Highgate Competition (highly Commended, 2014), the Kathleen Ferrier Bursary Competition (representing RCS), the Governor’s Recital Prize for Chamber music (winner, 2017), the Leonie Kayser Prize for Singing (winner, 2017), the Norma Grieg French Song Prize and Ramsay Calder Debussy Prize (winner 2017), the Hugh S. Robertson Prize for Scots Song (second place, 2018), the Ye Cronies Opera Competition (Highly commended, 2020) and the Clonter Opera prize (commended, 2021). In 2023, Lea was the overall winner of the inaugural Northern Alborough Festival New Voices Competition, receiving both the Seastock Trust First Prize and the Audience Prize. She received the 2014 Winnie Busfield Prize for Singing, the 2018 Musicians Company Silver Medal, support from the Sybil Tutton Opera Award, the Maurice Taylor Opera Scholarship, and is a Dewar Arts Awardee.

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A sought-after contemporary musician and collaborative artist/storyteller, she is passionate about the ways in which music can instigate social change and start conversations about the problems we face in contemporary life. She collaborates regularly with living composers and artists to create new works and installations on these subjects. She creates immersive performance experiences that highlight the universal communicative nature of the human voice and draw light to the lesser spoken about aspects of living in the Anthropocene. Taking up the mantle of a role model for future generations of young Black and BIPOC musicians, she strives to make contemporary music and opera accessible to all.

**Scottish Opera**

Notes to Editors

Scottish Opera is Scotland’s national opera company and the largest performing arts organisation in Scotland. The Company was founded in 1962 by Sir Alexander Gibson with the goal ‘to lay the treasures of opera at the feet of the people of Scotland’, opening with performances of *Madama Butterfly* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*. The 2022/23 season marked its 60th Anniversary.

Scottish Opera’s performance repertoire ranges across five centuries, from the earliest operas to newly commissioned world premieres, balancing favourites with under-explored works. The Company collaborates with the world’s finest singers and creatives, together with The Orchestra of Scottish Opera and choruses for each opera.

Recent accolades include an International Opera Award 2023 Nomination for *Il trittico*, a South Bank Sky Arts Award, a Scottish Award for New Music, Sunday Herald Culture Awards, a 2017 UK Theatre Award, and a 2020 RPS Award. The Company also won Outstanding achievement in Opera at the Critics’ Circle Awards 2023, for its production of Il trittico.

The Company took operas to Brooklyn in 2017 and Adelaide in 2020, and the 2022/23 season saw productions first staged at Scottish Opera appearing in Santa Fe, Madrid, Toulouse, and Los Angeles. The 60th Anniversary Season included the UK fully staged premiere of Osvaldo Golijov’s *Ainadamar* and the Company premiere of Puccini’s *Il trittico*.

The Company tours extensively across Scotland to ensure performances are within reach of as many of the country’s dispersed population as possible. This is one of the most extensive touring programmes of any European opera company and a much-valued contribution to Scotland’s cultural and artistic life, particularly in remote and island communities.

The Company’s Education & Outreach programme, the oldest in Europe, includes an annual in-person and digital Primary Schools Tour, bringing children the opportunity to perform their own specially commissioned piece alongside professional singers. Around 120 schools and 9,000 pupils take part each year. Scottish Opera aims to be inclusive and affordable through availability of free and cheap tickets, as well as performances offering audio description and specially-devised shorter Access performances.

Scottish Opera is committed to making opera for all, presenting opera at the highest possible standards in theatres across the country, outdoors on tour, and digital audiences around the world. The Company’s 2021 production of *The Gondoliers*, filmed live at Festival Theatre Edinburgh, is available on BBC iPlayer and OperaVision. Scottish Opera’s On Screen productions are available to watch at [www.scottishopera.org.uk/what-s-on/opera-on-screen](http://www.scottishopera.org.uk/what-s-on/opera-on-screen). The collection includes Donizetti’s *L’elisir d’amore*, Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel*, Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, Menotti’s *The Telephone*, *The Diary of One Who Disappeared*, *Mister MacNeep Has Lost His Sheep*, and Samuel Bordoli and Jenni Fagan’s *The Narcissistic Fish*.

Renowned for their flexibility and craftsmanship, Scottish Opera productions are frequently presented by opera houses across the globe. Two of our 60th Anniversary productions have been presented by co-producer Welsh National Opera: Osvaldo Golijov’s *Ainadamar* was in Cardiff, Llandudno, Bristol, Plymouth, Birmingham, Milton Keynes and Southampton from September to November 2023. Puccini’s *Il trittico* was presented in Cardiff in October 2024.

Following on from a run at the Opera Comique in Paris, Detroit Opera performed our 2019 production of Missy Mazzoli’s *Breaking the Waves* in April 2024. It just performed *Ainadamar,* which is also being presented by The Metropolitan Opera in New York this autumn. In spring 2025, *Breaking the Waves* opens at Houston Grand Opera in a co-production of Houston Grand Opera, Opera Ventures, Scottish Opera, Théâtre National de l’Opéra Comique, and Adelaide Festival that began life in Scotland.

In addition, our 2014 production of Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale* was performed twice in Canada: at Vancouver Opera in February 2024, and at Canadian Opera Company in Toronto in April and May 2024.

Scottish Opera is supported by the Scottish Government.

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