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ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY OF MUSIC HONOURS DISTINGUISHED MEZZO SOPRANO, JOYCE DIDONATO, WITH A FELLOWSHIP HONORIS CAUSA

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Ireland's leading music conservatoire, the Royal Irish Academy of Music, last night [Tues 4 Sep] awarded the distinguished American mezzo-soprano, Joyce DiDonato, with the Fellowship Honoris Causa, the highest artistic and academic accolade the institution can bestow. Since the RIAM's foundation in 1848, only 58 individuals have received the honour for their outstanding services to music, including the internationally renowned composers Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and Olivier Messiaen, mezzo-soprano Ann Murray DBE, flautist Sir James Galway, and the Director of London's Wigmore Hall, John Gilhooly OBE.

Universally acknowledged as one of the foremost singers of our time, Kansas-born Joyce DiDonato of Irish extraction, has been dubbed by the New Yorker as "perhaps the most potent female singer of her generation". She has soared to the top of the industry, both as a performer and as a fierce advocate for the arts, gaining international prominence and entrancing audiences worldwide in operas from Mozart and Handel to Rossini, Donizetti and Jake Heggie, as well as through her wide-ranging, acclaimed discography.

Speaking on receiving the award of Fellowship Honoris Causa Ms DiDonato said: "It's difficult to express how deeply touched I am by this extraordinary gesture from the Royal Irish Academy of Music. Of course, while I recognize the historical significance of such an honour, I'm afraid the overwhelming response is the wish that my parents could have been present to share this event with me. They passed on a fierce pride in our Irish heritage to all seven of us Flaherty children, and I can only imagine how their Irish eyes are smiling and beaming today. My gratitude is profound."

Recognising Ms DiDonato's extraordinary career and contribution to the arts at the Fellowship Ceremony which was held at the Reform Club in London last night, RIAM Director, Deborah Kelleher stated: "One of the ways in which we at the RIAM are refreshed, inspired and challenged is to look outside ourselves and at any moment in time, find out what is the best in the world in music performance. Who is setting the agenda, who is the thought leader, the innovator, the artist that makes us question ourselves and lifts our spirits? Joyce DiDonato with her technical and musical mastery; her passion for music as an art form; her ability to tap into the zeitgeist of the time and her awareness of how important the arts are to the human soul, is one of those agenda setters. By

honouring her with the Fellowship Honoris Causa, we form a link to an artist who will be remembered forever. RIAM's history is Ms DiDonato's history – we opened our doors as her ancestors were leaving Ireland in the 19th century and we welcome her back today, so that the national conservatoire in the country of her ancestors might be inspired by who she is and what she has achieved, to reach ever higher, ever better.”