

## SOPRANO HILARY CRONIN WINS FIRST PRIZE AND THE AUDIENCE PRIZE AT THE 2021 HANDEL SINGING COMPETITION



Hilary Cronin performing at the Handel Singing Competition © Chris Christodoulou

[Click here to watch the finals](#)

After a thrilling final, 29-year-old soprano **Hilary Cronin** won the £5000 First Prize and Audience Prize at the 2021 Handel Singing Competition last night.

Hilary Cronin impressed the judges with a performance which included works from Rinaldo, Semele and Brockes Passion alongside performances by baritone **Kieran Rayner**, mezzo-soprano **Bethany Horak-Hallett** and baritone **Felix Kemp**. All four finalists had the opportunity to sing with **Laurence Cummings** and the **London Handel Orchestra** in front of a live audience at St George's, Hanover Square, London. The event was also live streamed on the **London Handel Festival** [Youtube channel](#) and [Facebook page](#) to music-lovers watching from home.

The jury for the Competition this year included **Ian Partridge**, **Catherine Denley**, **Michael George**, **Tim Mead** and **Andrew Staples**.

Bethany Horak-Hallett won the £2000 Second Prize. In addition to the cash prizes, the Competition supports the continuing professional development of the Finalists by offering them guaranteed performance opportunities at the London Handel Festival in the future.

Gregory Batsleer, the new Festival Director of the London Handel Festival, says: *"The Handel Singing completion remains the jewel in the crown of the London Handel Festival. The standard across the entire competition has been one of the highest to date. Many congratulations to Hilary Cronin whose performance captivated us all who were there. We look forward to welcoming all finalists back to*

*future festivals and watching their careers flourish. Nurturing the careers of young musicians is and will continue to be at the core of this festival's mission. A huge thanks to all those particular individuals who supported this wonderful evening."*

Laurence Cummings, Musical Director, says: *"As ever its great privilege to work with such exceptional young singers, this year was no exception. As has been the case with all finalists of this competition, I have no doubt that each of our finalists will go on to have careers of distinction. Particular congratulations to this year's winner Hilary Cronin whose expression and commutation captured the true spirit of Handel."*

**Hilary Cronin** is a London-based soprano who trained at Trinity Laban Conservatoire and was a choral scholar at Royal Holloway, University of London. She has sung lead roles for Grimeborn, Baroquestock, Spitalfields Music and The New Generation Festivals as well as covered roles for English Touring Opera and Nevill Holt Opera. Hilary has toured with The Monteverdi Choir, Arcangelo, Philharmonia Voices and the Dunedin Consort, and worked with the BBC Singers, London Voices, The Marian Consort and Sansara.

The Handel Singing Competition launched in 2002 and has since become an integral part of the London Handel Festival. The competition this year received nearly 200 applications from 22 countries, including Australia, Cuba, New Zealand, Panama and Ukraine. Previous finalists include Iestyn Davies, Lucy Crowe, Grace Davidson, Tim Mead, Christopher Ainslie, Rupert Charlesworth and Ruby Hughes.

The next Handel Singing Competition will take place in Spring 2022.

-ENDS-

[www.london-handel-festival.com](http://www.london-handel-festival.com)

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#### **Notes to Editors**

#### **PHOTOS**

[Click here to access photos from the final](#)

All photos from the final © Chris Christodoulou

#### **JURY**

Ian Partridge CBE\*

Catherine Denley\*

Michael George\*

Tim Mead

Andrew Staples

\*Also adjudicated earlier rounds

#### **REPERTOIRE**

**1. Kieran Rayner baritone**

“Eduige, t’inganni...Di cupido impiego i vanni” HWV 19 Rodelinda

“Vieni o cara” HWV 6 Agrippina

“Racks, gibbets, sword and fire” HWV 68 Theodora

“Ove son!...Gelido in ogni vena” HWV 24 Siroe, re di Persia

“Me infelice...Del mio caro Bacco amabile” HWV 40 Serse

## **2. Bethany Horak-Hallett mezzo-soprano**

“Haec est Regina virginum” HWV 235

“Donna, che in ciel di tanta luce splendi... Vacillò, per terror del primo errore” HWV 233 Donna che in ciel

“Defend Her Heav’n” HWV 68 Theodora

## **3. Hilary Cronin soprano**

“Dunque i lacci...Ah crudel” HWV 7 Rinaldo

“Endless Pleasure” HWV 58 Semele

“Brich mein Herz” HWV 48 Brockes Passion

## **4. Felix Kemp baritone**

“Sorge Infausta” HWV 31 Orlando

“How Willing My Paternal Love” HWV 57 Samson

“Mie Piante Correte” HWV 122 Apollo e Dafne

“Vouchsafe O Lord” HWV 283 Dettingen Te Deum

“Why Do The Nations” HWV 56 Messiah

## **FINALISTS**

### **Hilary Cronin, soprano**

Hilary Cronin is a London-based soprano. She trained at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance and was a Robinson Hearn, Trinity College London, and Dame Susan Morden Scholar. Prior to this, Hilary read Music and was a choral scholar at Royal Holloway University of London, where she was awarded the Driver Prize for Excellence in Performance and the Dame Felicity Lott Bursary.

Hilary now enjoys a combination of freelance opera and ensemble singing. Hilary has sung lead roles for Grimeborn Festival, Baroquestock Festival, Spitalfields Music Festival and The New Generation Festival. Hilary has covered roles for English Touring Opera and Nevill Holt Opera and trained with British Youth Opera on their Serena Fenwick Programme 2020-21. This summer, Hilary performed the role of Mother in British Youth Opera and Silent Opera’s production of Hansel and Gretel at Opera Holland Park. Hilary is studying with Alison Wells and has taken part in masterclasses with Sir Mark Elder, Dame Felicity Lott, Dame Emma Kirkby, Susan Bullock, Michael Chance, Janis Kelly and Kathryn Harries. Hilary has toured with The Monteverdi Choir, Arcangelo, Philharmonia Voices, and Dunedin Consort. She has also worked with the BBC Singers, London Voices, The Marian Consort and Sansara.

Hilary is a member of St Martin’s Voices, Seraphim, and Echo, and is a regular soprano at St Bartholomew-the-Great and St Sepulchre-without-Newgate. Hilary often collaborates with Istante Baroque and the Will Todd Ensemble and was a Ferrier Awards 2020 Semi-Finalist. Upcoming projects include performances with Solomon’s Knot, English Voices, and The Rameau Project.

### **Bethany Horak-Hallett, mezzo-soprano**

British mezzo-soprano Bethany Horak-Hallett read Music at Leeds University and went on to gain a Masters in Music Performance followed by a Masters in Vocal Studies at Trinity Laban Conservatoire.

She is a Rising Star of the Enlightenment and was a finalist in the 2020 Cesti Competition at the Innsbruck Festival of Early Music.

Bethany's opera engagements have included Kitchen Boy Rusalka for Glyndebourne Festival Opera and the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester / Robin Ticciati; Woman Katya Kabanova at Glyndebourne; Cupid Venus and Adonis, Venere Il Ballo delle Ingrate and Enchanted Lady in Caccini La Liberazione di Ruggiero at the Brighton Early Music Festival; Cherubino Le Nozze di Figaro with the Merry Opera Company, Dorabella Così fan Tutte with London Young Sinfonia, Second Witch Dido & Aeneas at the Milton Abbey International Music Festival, Taa in Lewis Coenen-Rowe Collision at the Grimebourne Festival and Nerone L'Incoronazione di Poppea at Trinity Laban Conservatoire.

On the concert platform Bethany has appeared with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment singing Bach cantatas directed by Steven Devine, the St John Passion with Mark Padmore and Elijah with Masaaki Suzuki. She recently her BBC Proms début with the Monteverdi Choir / Sir John Eliot Gardiner for Handel Dixit Dominus and appeared with the English Chamber Orchestra / James Sherlock. Bethany recorded Cupid in John Eccles Semele with the Academy of Ancient Music / Julian Perkins.

Her plans include a tour with Holland Baroque plus Bach Cantatas and Aci in Handel Aci, Galatea e Polifemo with the OAE.

### **Felix Kemp, baritone**

A Britten-Pears Young Artist, Felix Kemp has sung principal roles for Lyric Opera, Dublin, English Touring Opera, Grange Park Opera, Longborough Festival Opera, Opera Holland Park and at the Wexford Festival. His recordings include Juan in Joseph Phibbs' *Juliana*, awaiting release on Resonus Classics, and Pierrot in Ethel's Smyth's *Fête Galante* for Retrospect Opera, selected as a Favourite CD of 2019 by Manchester Classical Music.

Recent engagements have included *Songs by Schubert* (arranged by Brahms) for the Royal Scottish National Orchestra's Spring 2021 Digital Season and Luke Styles' *Awakening Shadow* (a combination of original scenes by Luke Styles and Benjamin Britten's *Canticles*) at the Cheltenham and Prestiegne Festivals. A committed recitalist he joined Roderick Williams this Summer for performances as part of Barbara Hannigan's *Momentum: Our Future, Now* initiative.

His engagements in 2021 / 2022 include Masetto *Don Giovanni* at the Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford, Papageno *The Magic Flute* for Oxford Opera, Adham in the world première of Will Todd's *Migrations* for Welsh National Opera, the *St Matthew Passion* with Bournemouth Symphony Chorus, Brahms *A German Requiem* at Saffron Hall, Mozart *Mass in C Minor* with Opus 48, Poulenc *Le bestiaire* for Oxford Lieder, Verdi *Requiem* in Winchester Cathedral, the 2021 *Leeds Castle Open Air Classical Concert* with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, *An Obsession with Hedonism – Baudelaire* for the opening of the 2021 London Song Festival and a recital with Simon Lepper for the 2021 Rye Arts Festival.

### **Kieran Rayner, baritone**

Kieran Rayner is a London-based New Zealand baritone. He is a Britten Pears Young Artist 2021-22, and has been a Young Artist with Garsington Opera (winning the Sandbach Prize), Independent Opera, Verbier Festival, Samling Arts, Internationale Meistersinger Akademie, and has been generously supported by the Kiri Te Kanawa Foundation. He was a Wigmore Hall International Song Competition semifinalist 2019 and Royal Overseas League prize winner. Recent roles include Forester *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Longborough Festival Opera); Notar *Der Rosenkavalier*, Prince of

Mantua *Fantasio*, cover Remo *The Skating Rink* (Garsington); Pierre Lafitte *Cabildo* (Wilton's Music Hall); L'Horloge Comtoise *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* (VOPERA); Crespel *Tales of Hoffmann*, cover Anténor *Dardanus* & Albert *Werther* (English Touring Opera); Silvio *Pagliacci* (NZ); Eisenstein *Die Fledermaus* (Singapore); Pierre Lafitte *Cabildo*; Sharpless *Madam Butterfly*; Figaro *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*; Figaro *Le Nozze di Figaro*; Mari / Directeur *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*. Concert highlights include *Dare to Dream*, Royal Albert Hall (Garsington, Hannah Conway); *Serenade to Music*, Buckingham Palace (John Wilson), and Stravinsky *Pulcinella* (Jurowski). He graduated from the Royal College of Music Opera School, with roles including The Forester, Eisenstein, Demetrius *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Nardo *La Finta Giardiniera*, and Vicar Gedge *Albert Herring*, plus two principal roles with British Youth Opera. [www.kieranrayner.com](http://www.kieranrayner.com)

#### PRIZES

**First Prize: £5,000** generously supported by Philip Carne and the Carne Trust

**Second Prize: £2,000** supported in memory of Michael Ewart

**Audience Prize: £300**

**Finalists Prize: £300** generously supported by an endowment gift in memory of Howard & Nan Hopkin

#### HANDEL SINGING COMPETITION

The composer George Frideric Handel was known to encourage and train young, unestablished singers, many of whom rose to fame as his star soloists. The London Handel Festival continues Handel's great tradition of nurturing talent through our international Handel Singing Competition. Inaugurated in 2022, the competition has grown to become a major international singing event attracting 180 applicants from 22 countries in 2021.

The calibre of the competition is demonstrated by past winners and finalists who have gone on to become internationally recognised musicians, not just in the baroque music field, and give regular appearances in the world's leading opera houses. They include, Iestyn Davies, Lucy Crowe, Grace Davidson, Tim Mead, Christopher Ainslie, Rupert Charlesworth and Ruby Hughes. The competition comprises a preliminary round of reviewing files sent digitally and then the first 'live' round at Craxton Studios in north London. Then follows the Semi-Final with 10 singers (2021) accompanied by harpsichord, and then the Final where singers are accompanied by the London Handel Orchestra, conducted by Laurence Cummings.

As well as cash prizes and the chance to work with a professional baroque orchestra, one of the key benefits of getting through to the semi-finals and finals is the increased profile, through significant press and promoter interest, which leads to numerous engagements; this has been the vehicle through which many have been able to build their professional careers. All finalists are also offered recitals and roles in future London Handel Festival events; in recent years, the winners of the first and second prizes have been invited to give recitals at the Handel Festivals in Goettingen and Halle, Germany and the New Walk Museum in Leicester among many other renowned institutions.

<https://www.london-handel-festival.com/handel-singing-competition/>

#### LONDON HANDEL FESTIVAL

"...the London Handel Festival has superbly lived up to its name by presenting more and more of Handel's operas...the achievement of unlocking this treasure chest of sublime music and drama is truly remarkable." Richard Morrison, BBC Music, November 2021.

The London Handel Festival is an annual celebration of the life and work of composer George Frideric Handel. The Festival's core charitable and artistic objective is to explore the full repertoire of Handel, to nurture emerging talent, and bring the music of Handel to broader audiences. Founded in

1978, the London Handel Festival has played a crucial role in the revival of interest in Handel's music. Throughout the year, the Festival presents some 40 events held in venues across London celebrating Handel's extraordinary creative life in the city which he made home.

The London Handel Orchestra is directed by Laurence Cummings, one of the world's pre-eminent Handelian conductors, and led by Adrian Butterfield. The orchestra collaborates with leading soloists in numerous performances throughout the Festival, often reviving lesser-known works.

The Handel Singing Competition, inaugurated in 2002, is an integral part of the Festival. Past finalists are invited to sing on a regular basis at the Festival, and the competition has helped launch the career of many leading stars including Iestyn Davies, Lucy Crowe, Grace Davidson, Tim Mead, Christopher Ainslie, Rupert Charlesworth and Ruby Hughes.

Primarily based at St George's Church, Hanover Square, where Handel worshipped, the Festival has also worked with a range of established venues and artistic partners including the Linbury Theatre at the ROH, Wigmore Hall, St John's Smith Square and the Early Music Opera Company. The London Handel Festival also works with groups such as La Nuova Musica, the English Concert and Opera Settecento.

[www.london-handel-festival.com](http://www.london-handel-festival.com)