****

##### Press Release

1 February 2023

**SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT GRANT AWARDED TO SCOTTISH OPERA’S GROUNDBREAKING PROJECT *breath cycle II* for people LIVING WITH LONG COVID**

Scottish Opera’s groundbreaking project, *Breath Cycle* *II*, designed to support those with a range of conditions affecting lung health, in particular Long COVID, has been awarded a grant of £86,892 by the Scottish Government.

With an estimated 187,000 people in Scotland living with Long COVID, this grant will enable Scottish Opera to reach more people in all corners of the country (including more remote communities), increase the number of participants who can take part in the project’s workshops, deliver a training programme for nine session tutors and promote the issues around the condition in general.

As part of this expansion and continuation of the existing workshops, today, (1 February) Scottish Opera launched a new set of free, online resources for *Breath Cycle II* which are available to individuals, choirs and singing groups worldwide.

**Health Secretary Humza Yousaf said: ‘I** recognise the impact that Long COVID can have on the health and wellbeing of those affected, and I’m delighted the Scottish Government is supporting this fantastic initiative which will help hundreds of people in Scotland and beyond. As well as third-sector organisations, all NHS Scotland boards are already providing assessment and support for people with Long COVID, delivered across our healthcare system – backed by our substantial 2022-23 £18 billion investment in health.’

**Jane Davidson** MBE, Scottish Opera’s Director of Outreach and Education said: ‘Since *Breath Cycle* recommenced in Autumn 2021, over 150 people from Scotland and across the world have been helping themselves to regain both their physical and mental health through a series of online training and mentoring sessions with a group of Scottish Opera artists. These sessions have produced our first collection of songs created by citizen songwriters living with COVID, and are heart-warming and heart breaking in equal measures, underpinned by the authenticity of personal experiences.

‘Scored by composer Gareth Williams, the songs are performed by singers from classical, music theatre, folk and indie genres and as the collection grows over the next year, we hope it will inspire and enthuse many more talented people to come and join us online as we launch *Breath Cycle II*.’

There has been lots of positive feedback from *Breath Cycle* participants, with one commenting how the hour-long, online sessions helped them slow down and work on their recovery from Long COVID. Others said they felt “much better and more relaxed about life in general” afterwards and how it was “lovely sharing time with people in the same position with Long COVID.”

|  |
| --- |
| During lockdown, Scottish Opera repurposed the original *Breath Cycle* project to offer support to people struggling with the debilitating effects of Long COVID. Participants joined an online programme of gentle vocal training and breathing exercises designed to re-build physical and mental resilience, and in addition to these workshops, online song writing sessions were available, mentored by composer **Gareth Williams** and writer **Martin O’Connor**. These resulted in a series of songs called *The Covid Composers Songbook*, a positive musical legacy of the past two years, which form part of the digital resources materials available to download for no charge from Scottish Opera’s website.  The Songbook is officially launched tonight during a celebratory event at Saint Luke’s & The Winged Ox in Glasgow, which features the first public performance of the new songs by musicians and singers from both classical and folk genres, including singer-songwriter **Louis Abbott** from Admiral Fallow, as well as Scottish Opera’s 70-strong Community Choir. Artists who led the workshops will speak about the benefits of the project, as will some of the participants. |

Composer **Gareth Williams** said: ‘*Breath Cycle* is our space to celebrate the voice: to sing together, to tell stories, and make our own songs. New songs are always needed, and as our participants learned to sing, we invited them to tell their stories. From these stories, we have our first Songbook. To begin with, many of the stories were about tough times, about worry, about tiredness, about home, about doing the dishes, about being silenced, about family, about bad weather, but from each story came a song with hope in its bones  — songs of finding strength and resilience. When Martin and I began the project, we were looking forward to helping people. We didn’t expect to find such incredible collaborators.’

*The* *Breath Cycle* project was originally created in 2013 by Scottish Opera and Glasgow’s Gartnavel General Hospital Cystic Fibrosis Service, to explore whether learning classical singing techniques, including breath control, can improve the wellbeing of cystic fibrosis patients. Scottish Opera relaunched the project in 2021, where during a series of relaxed weekly sessions, a team of musicians from the Company worked with participants introducing them to fun and stimulating songs, vocal exercises and breathing techniques.

The fifth block of singing and song writing workshops begins on 15February and runs until April. Registration for the February sessions is open now, and the registration for the April sessions opens in March. These free sessions take place on Zoom and are limited to 50 participants. To register your interest and access the resources visit [www.scottishopera.org.uk/join-in/breath-cycle/](http://www.scottishopera.org.uk/join-in/breath-cycle/)

As well as the Scottish Government, *Breath Cycle* receives funding fromCruach Trust, The Murdoch Forrest Charitable Trust, W M Mann Foundation, Souter Charitable Trust and Scottish Opera’s Education Angels.

-ENDS-

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

You can follow Scottish Opera on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram **@ScottishOpera**

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 marks 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 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 took operas to Brooklyn in 2017 and Adelaide in 2020, and the 2022/23 season sees productions first staged at Scottish Opera appearing in Santa Fe, Madrid, Toulouse, and Los Angeles. The 60th Anniversary Season includes 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 year, 60 locations across the length and breadth of the country. Specially-adapted 40-foot long trailers bring Pop-up Opera performances to thousands of people each year. 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. 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, Opera Highlights, Menotti’s The Telephone, and Samuel Bordoli and Jenni Fagan’s The Narcissistic Fish. A new commission will be announced in 2023.

N:\PRESS\Scottish Opera 22-23\New Scottish Government Logo.png

**For additional press details please contact:**

Emily Henderson, Press Manager, 0141 242 0511, [**emily.henderson@scottishopera.org.uk**](mailto:emily.henderson@scottishopera.org.uk)

Julie McLaughlin, Press Officer, 0141 242 0552, **julie.mclaughlin@scottishopera.org.uk**