



## 6th European Opera Singing Competition DEBUT 2012: A glittering finale

**Kartal Karagedik of Turkey wins the Golden Victoria**

**330 young singers from 48 different countries originally applied to enter. In the end, six talented newcomers remained. In the grand finale of DEBUT 2012, the 6th European Opera Singing Competition, they faced the critical verdict of the jury and the acclaim of an enthusiastic audience. As in previous years, this glittering opera gala on the evening of Saturday, September 29 at the Bad Mergentheim Wandelhalle was hosted by Jan Hofer, Senior Newsreader on ARD's television news, who presided over the event in his familiar charming style.**

"We as a company have a duty to get involved by lending our support to young artists", said Dr. Manfred Wittenstein, President of WITTENSTEIN AG and the competition's initiator, when interviewed by Hofer about his motivation. When the very first event was staged back in 2002, Wittenstein was not simply realizing his vision of mounting a competition of international significance. Through his personal and financial commitment he was also sending out a powerful cultural policy signal.

The cooperation with Jeunesses Musicales Germany (JMD) – a DEBUT partner since 2010 – has visibly added to the event's prestige, which has grown steadily over the years. This musical youth association has links with a worldwide network and the number of participants has leapt by more than forty percent in the short time since it became a collaborator. The DEBUT competition has also attracted considerable international attention in the opera world.

Kammersängerin Edda Moser, patron of DEBUT 2012, was extremely impressed by the high standard of the contestants. "Singing is controlled ecstasy", she asserted when asked to describe the challenges associated with a career in opera. Learning how to deal with defeat is another important lesson. One not-to-be-underestimated aspect of her job as patron was consoling the unlucky ones who failed to reach the final.

September 30, 2012

DEBUT, the European Opera Singing Competition, supports young opera singers hoping to embark on an international career. It is open to the following vocal categories: soprano, mezzo-soprano and alto, tenor, counter-tenor, baritone and bass. Held every second year since 2002, DEBUT gives ambitious newcomers a unique opportunity to showcase their talents.



The winners of DEBUT 2012

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Parallel to the qualifying rounds at Weikersheim Castle Music Academy, the young singers took part in drama training workshops designed to give them an excellent grounding for their future work on the opera stage. Vocal quality, technique, musicality and artistic personality – each contestant was required to convince the jury members in each of these four categories with their rendering of two opera arias. The lieder, as a compulsory element of the competition, placed additional demands on the finalists. "The lied may be a comparatively small form but it's also a whole cosmos", explained Patrick Bialdya, Artistic Director of DEBUT since 2010. It opens up space in which both the audience and the jury can become acquainted with the singers in a more subtle and more poetic way. The lieder section of DEBUT, in which four candidates were selected to participate, was won by Kartal Karagedik, the Turkish baritone, on Thursday, September 27.

### **Outstanding performance by all finalists**

In the light of the outstanding performance by all six finalists on the Saturday evening at the Wandelhalle, where not a single seat was left empty, it was clear from the outset that the jury would face a difficult decision. The three singers of each sex who competed in the opera gala were technically brilliant, passionate and charismatic. They were accompanied by the Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen, conducted by Catherine Rückwardt, who complemented the renditions by the talented young soloists discreetly and expertly. The evening was opened by the orchestra with the prelude to Wagner's "Mastersingers" – a perfect choice to match the mood of the occasion.

Daniela Gerstenmeyer of Germany was the first of the six finalists to take to the stage, with Ännchen's aria "My deceased cousin had a dream" from Weber's "The Free Shooter". A lyrical soprano from Bietigheim-Bissingen, not far from Stuttgart, she thrilled the jury with her natural aura and clear contours. In the second half of the evening she gave a seemingly effortless performance of Morgana's aria from Handel's opera "Alcina", soaring smoothly up to the high notes.

Iurii Samoilov, a baritone from Belarus, began with an interpretation of Onegin's aria from Tchaikovsky's "Eugene

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Onegin". Just twenty-four years old, his soft timbre was pleasing to the ear yet he remained rather colourless with some weaknesses in intonation. In the second half he gave a spirited rendition of the Champagne Aria from Mozart's "Don Giovanni". Unfortunately, his temperamental performance was somewhat rushed.

The next finalist to take to the stage was Lussine Levoni from Armenia, born in 1981 and the second of three sopranos. Whereas her interpretation of "Juliet" from Gounod's "Romeo and Juliet" was sporadically short of breath, she shone in the second part of the evening as Lucia in Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor". Although the high notes were slightly squeezed, her performance was remarkably varied.

The first "bravos!" from the audience were heard when Kartal Karagedik, a Turkish baritone born in 1984, reached the end of his intimate and contrasted interpretation of Wolfram's romance "O thou, my gracious evening star" from Wagner's "Tannhäuser". His rendition was a resounding success yet he managed to exceed it with his second piece – a truly brilliant version of Renato's aria from Verdi's "A Masked Ball".

Yitian Luan, a Chinese soprano born in 1980, chose Donna Anna's aria from Mozart's "Don Giovanni" and Violetta's aria from Verdi's "La Traviata" for her appearance in the final. The audience were captivated by her creative and most effective performance. Her coloraturas were immaculate, even if sometimes a little vocally forced.

Alexey Bogdanchikov, a baritone born in Uzbekistan in 1985, began with a rendition of the aria "Ja Vas lyublyu – I love you beyond measure" from Tchaikovsky's "The Queen of Spades. He particularly impressed with his powerful stage presence and vocal perfection. His voice was balanced in all registers and even the high notes took on a remarkable lustre. The few minor rhythmic errors in Figaro's aria from Rossini's "The Barber of Seville" did nothing to detract from his authoritative performance.

### **Prizes, prizes, prizes...**

Although Harald Stamm, Jury Chairman and Kammersänger, admitted that there was very little to choose between the six finalists, in the end there was a clear winner: Dr. Manfred

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Wittenstein, initiator of the DEBUT competition, presented the Golden Victoria and 10,000 euros in cash to a delighted Kartal Karagedik from Turkey. He was equally convincing in all four categories: vocal quality, technique, repertoire and artistic interpretation – all in all, easily the most coherent performance.

Second place and 5000 euros went to Alexey Bogdanchikov of Uzbekistan. The Bronze Victoria and 2500 euros were bestowed on Yitian Luan, the Chinese soprano. Other prizes of 500 euros for fourth to sixth place were awarded to Lussine Levoni and Daniela Gerstenmeyer (joint fourth) as well as Iurii Samoilov (fifth).

A special prize worth 3000 euros was donated by Jeunesses Musicales Germany. Chang Liu, a 23 year-old tenor from China, received a full scholarship for "Young Opera Schloss Weikersheim", JMD's traditional International Opera Academy and one of Europe's most prestigious projects for the upcoming generation of opera singers. Next year, he will play the part of Don Ottavio in Mozart's "Don Giovanni".

The 6th European Opera Singing Competition DEBUT is traditionally welcomed by the General Managers of renowned opera houses as a splendid opportunity to discover and hire talented young singers. This year, once again, a whole series of sponsorship awards and opportunities for public performances were announced. The fact that several contestants who were eliminated at the semi-final stage were also honoured only serves to underline the competition's generally high standard.

One such special prize, presented by Bronnbach Monastery Friends of Classical Music along with an invitation worth 1000 euros to interpret a solo role in Verdi's "Requiem" or participate in a lieder recital, was shared by Alazaroae Remus, the Romanian tenor, and German mezzo-soprano Annika Schlicht.

Soprano Daniela Gerstenmeyer's achievement was rewarded by the Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen with the chance of a concert appearance together with the orchestra worth 1500 euros.

Four other opportunities to perform in public, worth a total of 7000 euros, were donated by the Gottlob Frick Society in Heilbronn to Egyptian mezzo-soprano Gala El Hadidi, Polish counter-tenor Jakub Józef Orlinski and the two finalists Yitian Luan and Alexey

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Bogdanchikov.

A special prize worth 1200 euros was awarded to Alazaroe Remus by the Lotte Lehmann Academy.

Alexey Bogdanchikov and Kartal Karagedik additionally received special prizes from the Theater Erfurt and the Theater Leipzig.

**Photo 1:**

DEBUT 2012 winners: Kartal Karagedik, Golden Victoria (centre), Alexey Bogdanchikov, Silver Victoria (left) and Yitian Luan, Bronze Victoria (right).

**Photo 2:**

Dr. Manfred Wittenstein, President of WITTENSTEIN AG and initiator of the European Opera Singing Competition DEBUT (left), in conversation with Jan Hofer (right).

**Photo 3:**

Catherine Rückwardt, conductor of the Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen at the Bad Mergentheim Wandelhalle.

- **DEBUT 2012** ([www.debut.de](http://www.debut.de)) began on September 24, 2012 with the qualifying rounds at Weikersheim Castle Music Academy. The six finalists were announced following the semi-final on September 26.
- The DEBUT competition ([www.debut.de](http://www.debut.de)) has forged a novel link between industry, technology and culture. It manages without any form of public sponsorship and as such is completely independent. The competition was initiated by mechatronics specialist WITTENSTEIN AG. It is the fulfilment of a personal vision by Dr. Manfred Wittenstein, company President and past-President of the German Engineering Federation (VDMA). DEBUT 2012 was endowed with prizes worth more than 30,000 euros. Professor Edda Moser (Kammersängerin), the well-known soprano and Cologne professor of singing, and BDI President Professor Hans-Peter Keitel acted as joint patrons. Jeunesses Musicales Germany (JMD) has been a DEBUT partner since 2010.

Texts and photographs in printable quality can be downloaded from <http://www.debut.de>.

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