



Press Release

Thursday 8 September 2011

Seventeen final year drama students awarded with SOLT's 2011 Laurence Olivier Bursaries

The Society of London Theatre (SOLT) has awarded seventeen talented final year drama students from across the UK with bursaries worth a combined total of £56,000. They will be following in the footsteps of previous recipients such as Bryony Hannah, Ewan McGregor, Daniel Rigby and Michael Sheen.

The Laurence Olivier Bursary was established by the Society of London Theatre in 1987 to commemorate the 80th birthday of Sir Laurence Olivier, who was keen to help young actors who had the potential to make a major contribution to British theatre. The Laurence Olivier Bursary aims to help students who have considerable talent but are facing financial difficulties in completing their studies. The demands of their course make part-time jobs almost impossible, which is why the bursary can make such a difference.

Each summer SOLT invites the principals of selected drama schools to submit two nominations for the bursary. The nominees should be approaching their final year and fulfill the dual criteria of financial need and evident talent. About 40 students are entered each June and appear before a panel of theatre industry professionals chaired by West End producer Lee Menzies where they give a ten minute audition, followed by an interview.

Four Laurence Olivier bursaries worth £7,500 each are usually given out as well as smaller sums at the discretion of the judges. Other organisations contribute their own bursaries in conjunction with the Society's scheme.

SOLT's President Mark Rubinstein was joined by the Society's Chief Executive Julian Bird, at a Members' meeting, to present the students with their bursaries on Thursday 8 September 2011. He said: "What's fantastic is that the students who were awarded bursaries today were all put forward by the Principals of their colleges; people who have watched them evolve and really know that they extraordinary talent, but are facing severe financial hardship. It is wonderful that we can provide some extra financial support to ensure they can complete their training and become vital players in the West End and the UK's great acting fraternity."

The 2011 bursaries are awarded as follows:

- **Laurence Olivier Bursaries:** Emma Hook (Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts); Chris Leask (London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art); Michaela Coel (Guildhall School of Music and

Drama); Jason Callender (Manchester Metropolitan University); Alasdair Hankinson (Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama); Prisca Shallcross (Oxford School of Drama); Matthew Benjamin (Drama Studio); Melissa Johns (East 15 Acting School); Adam Nagaitis (Royal Academy of Dramatic Art); Dan Parr (Arts Educational Schools)

- **Laurence Olivier Bursary and Mary Selway Bursary** (given in alternate years in memory of the late casting director Mary Selway by the Casting Directors Guild): Edwin Thomas (Guildhall School of Music and Drama)
- **Carmen Silvera Bursary** (given by agent Barry Burnett in memory of the late actress Carmen Silvera): Jennifer Greenwood
- **Behrens Foundation Bursary** (Established by Michael Behrens, a leading City of London merchant banker, the Behrens Foundation provides a considerable annual support for a range of the performing arts, including theatre): Maria Louis (Academy of Live and Recorded Arts); Lorna Nickson-Brown (Drama Centre); Stephanie Hyam (Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts); Molly Gromadzki (Royal Academy of Dramatic Art); Jennifer English (Birmingham School of Acting).

-ENDS-

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

- Images available of recipients at awards presentation
- Interviews with the Olivier Bursary panel and recipients may be available upon request.
- Background information: <http://www.solt.co.uk/bursaries.html>
- **The Society of London Theatre (SOLT)** is the association which represents the producers, theatre owners and managers of the 52 major commercial and grant-aided theatres in central London. The organisation exists in order to promote theatregoing, develop audiences, and to serve, protect and promote the interests of those engaged in theatre across London, through activities including The Olivier Awards with MasterCard, **tkts** ticket booth, the Official London Theatre guide, Theatre Tokens and the annual promotions Kids Week in the West End and Get Into London Theatre.