

THE 2016 AESS COURTNEY KENNY AWARD

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From left to right: Leilani Barratt, Caroline Taylor, James Orford, Courtney Kenny, George Todica, Louisa Stirland. Photo credit: Stephen Miles

Earlier this month, I had the wonderful experience of taking part in the Courtney Kenny Award!

The Award, funded by Courtney Kenny himself and organised by the Association of English Singers and Speakers, aims “to encourage the communication of English words, in singing and in speech, with clarity, understanding and imagination”. It seemed like the perfect opportunity to explore new repertoire, recite some of my favourite poetry and meet other young singers and accompanists! The preliminary round was held in Barnes at the end of February; I was thrilled to then progress to the final round, which took place on Mother’s Day at Tonbridge School in Kent.

My programme, entitled *Love went-a-riding* (after the song of the same name), explored love in all its forms – or, at least, in as many forms as possible in twenty minutes! I included poetry by e e cummings, A. A. Milne, Walter de la Mare, Keats and Shakespeare, interwoven with songs by Quilter, Armstrong-

Gibbs, Head, Vaughan Williams and Bridge. The programme was beautifully accompanied by Mairi Grewar, with whom I had previously worked during my time in St Andrews.

I was delighted to have the opportunity to speak, recite and sing and to listen to the programmes of the other five performers, all of which were brilliant and completely different from one another. It was also lovely to hear Courtney and the members of the AESS speak about the goals of the Award; singing and recitation side-by-side really do produce some of the most engaging performances and there is so much fantastic repertoire to choose from, both well-known and obscure.

When the three winners were announced following the final round, I was absolutely thrilled to place second! Leilani Barratt, mezzo-soprano, came first and Louisa Stirland, soprano, third; James Orford and George Todica deservedly took home half each of the Pianist's Prize. With my prize money, I've now been able to enter my first ever Concerto Competition and to book an upcoming fund-raising recital for my MMus at the RNCM (details of both to follow soon).

It was such a joy to take part and I would highly recommend the Award for anyone looking to build their programme-making skills, to break into the English song repertoire or to use their long-forgotten poetry talents. Many thanks to Courtney Kenny, Sarah Leonard, Julia Dewhurst, Mark Nixon, Michael and Judith Hildesley and Stephen Miles – and to the wonderful audience who came to watch the final!

For more information about the Award, please click [here](#).