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UCT opera student wins Belvedere Singing Competition

Levy Sekgapane, a student in the University of Cape Town Opera School, has won the 24th International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition held in Amsterdam this month. He is the second UCT student to win the prestigious international contest.

Sekgapane's prizes include opera engagements (if roles are available) at the Aalto Theatre und Philharmonie Essen, the Festliche Operngala der Deutschen AIDS-Stiftung and the Gran Teatre del Liceu Barcelona. He also received the Wil Keune Prize (of €500), which is awarded to a young singer of real potential born after 1989.

"Winning the Belvedere competition is the first step that every opera singer wants before turning professional," said Sekgapane. "It has opened doors for me. The 15 adjudicators are all directors of the big opera companies around the world."

Sekgapane said that because the adjudicators are world-renowned opera directors, he would not have to work hard generating publicity around his work. Winning the Belvedere Competition will give him exposure to global audiences.

"It is good to be known, because opera is competitive and many directors don't want to listen to young people," he said.

UCT was well-represented at the finals of this year's competition, which included singers from Canada, Finland, Georgia, Norway, Russia, Slovenia, South Korea and the US. Sekgapane was one of four UCT trained singers who made up over a quarter of the finalists. The other three are Noluvuyiso Mpofu (Cape Town Opera Studio member), Lukhanyo Moyake (Cape Town Opera staff soloist) and Caroline Modiba (former Cape Town Opera Studio member).

UCT alumni who have won the Belvedere Competition in the past include Pretty Yende, who won first prize in 2009 - the first artist in the history of the competition to win all the category first prizes, including Opera and Operetta, the Media Jury Prize, as well as the Audience Prize and Chambre Professionnelle des Directeurs d'Opera Prize.

The Belvedere Competition was introduced in Vienna, Austria, in 1982 and all finals were held there until 2012. Amsterdam hosted the 2013 finals, followed by Düsseldorf in 2014 and Amsterdam again in 2015.

The 2016 finals will be held in Cape Town.

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