



FACE TO FACE

For over a decade, Maureen Amar and Richard Jenkins have generously funded scholarships for Guildhall students. These scholarships give talented young performers like Josep-Ramon Olivé (Opera) and Abigail Richardson (Acting) the opportunity to learn their craft free from the financial burden of tuition fees. PLAY brought them together to discover the true value of this gift

Left to right: Abigail Richardson, Maureen Amar and Richard Jenkins

Maureen Amar & Richard Jenkins

You have been generous supporters of Guildhall School for over a decade. What motivated you to support Guildhall in particular?

MA & RJ Guildhall brings together accomplished and talented instrumental, vocal, drama and technical theatre students in one institution, alongside a very appreciative and supportive Development department. We also had the personal motivation that a friend of ours attended Guildhall in the 1960s and was forced to abandon his studies due to lack of finance.

Can you share a little about your own careers and lives?

MA I wanted to be a social worker but spent most of my professional life in social and market research before joining our family firm of food importers, which was founded by my father in 1945. Whilst still working part-time, I am now thoroughly enjoying my role as a Governor of a primary school in a deprived area.

RJ If vocational guidance had existed in the 1950s, I would have become a chef, but after several years of playing bridge at two universities, I abandoned the idea of an academic career and founded the first of my three companies in 1966. Miraculously, one survives for which I still work, albeit part-time.

You first sponsored an opera scholarship and went on to also offer a scholarship in acting. Are these disciplines particularly close to your hearts?

MA & RJ Most certainly. On average, we're at the opera or in the theatre at least once a week.



Josep-Ramon Olivé

You take an active interest in the careers of the students you support. Has it given you a sense of personal satisfaction to see them progress?

MA & RJ It's enough to have contributed to the development of any talented career, but there's always an exhilaration when they get that lucky break that takes them to the next level. Several of our students have become good friends and as our sponsorship expands we're becoming a couple of septo-euro-groupies!

Do you believe it's important for people who are in a position to 'give something back' to do so?

MA & RJ Absolutely. We're both atheists but we like the concept of Samnyāsin (abandonment). When you've attained a level of financial security there's no point in accumulating more for personal possession. In 2002 we established our Trust Fund to provide postgraduate funding for the arts and sciences and to establish the pattern for the disposal of our estate upon our decease. For the past thirteen years it has been the most rewarding and pleasurable investment we have ever made and it has given a new purpose and direction to our lives now that we are both in our seventies.

Josep-Ramon Olivé and Abigail Richardson

Tell us about how you came to be at Guildhall – when did you first become interested in the performing arts as a career?

JRO I started music education when I was four, and joined a boys' choir school in Spain at the age of 10. We performed all over the world, including Japan, Germany and France. It was then I discovered my passion for singing. I came to Guildhall mainly because of my teacher, Rudolf Piernay. I met him at a summer masterclass in Vienna in 2011 and thought he was worth coming to London for. Guildhall sounded really interesting and exciting so I decided it was time to move abroad to this huge city and expose myself to the pressure of sharing a class with so many talented young singers.

AR It sounds cheesy, but I knew I wanted to be an actor after performing in a school production when I was eight. At 16, I toured with a professional show and found myself once again feeling right at home. I decided to go to drama school, but I was living in France at the time and the schools I called all preferred applicants with degrees. So I studied for my degree in French Modern Literature and then applied to Guildhall. It wasn't until the second round of auditions that I discovered just how prestigious the school was. Despite its stellar reputation the place had an amazing warmth and the auditions were so human. I was overjoyed when I was accepted on the MA.

How have you found the Guildhall experience so far?

JRO Coming to Guildhall is one of the best decisions I've ever made in my life. The work I've done with my professor, Rudolf Piernay, has helped me to improve my vocal, and the School has provided me with so many interesting

and challenging opportunities. I also really value the healthy and positive feeling of competition: Guildhall is full of talented singers and this has made me more demanding in my own career goals.

AR It's even better than I thought it would be. I knew I'd be acting of course, but I didn't expect it to be so intense and diverse. We go from acrobatics to singing to voice to circus to project rehearsals... we never stop! It's been such a life lesson for me – I feel I'm growing every day. The tutors are incredible and the course has changed me in the best possible way. My views have broadened, I'm more aware of what's going on around me, and I enjoy even the smallest things in life so much more. All these possibilities are opening up for me now and I just have to grab them.

What barriers might you have faced had the scholarship not been available to you?

JRO I had some financial support for my first two years at Guildhall, but relied on my parents' help to pay the rest of my expenses. I'm now in my third year of four, and since my parents can no longer afford to support me, my scholarship from the the Amar-Franes & Foster-Jenkins Trust and the Sheila White Bequest is crucial. Without their help it would have been impossible for me to stay at Guildhall and take part in such a great training programme. I view these two years as a gift and a unique opportunity to enhance my opera training.

AR In France, university education is free, so anyone can study. When I decided I wanted to go to drama school in England I did worry that I was living in a dream world – how could I find the money to pay tuition and support myself? My parents are both artists so they're not on a stable income. I couldn't believe it when I was accepted

for the scholarship. I still remember holding the letter in my hands and thinking 'Who does this?' To be willing to help young people to pursue their dreams is a beautiful thing. I mentally thank Maureen and Richard every day. This course requires so much energy – you have to be really present and open, and you can't do that if you're worrying about money.

What is your ultimate ambition for your career?

JRO My goal for the future is to be a professional opera singer, and perform many different roles all over the world. In the meantime, I find it so interesting and grounding to be able to achieve a really accurate level of communication to the audience. I believe this should be the main goal for all singers: to tell a story, provoke a reaction and make the listener experience emotions. The better and more varied the singer's communicative skills, the more powerful and effective the impact to the audience.

AR Originally I was only interested in theatre, but now I'm interested in other platforms too. Guildhall has really opened my eyes. Sometimes I feel almost guilty that I get to be here, as I wish everyone could have this experience. That's why it's so important to have people like Maureen and Richard, who are willing to help open this world up for a new generation.