

# Breaking the sound barrier... in Gaelic

## Blind singer masters language to triumph at Mod

BORN blind in Sardinia and suffering from hearing damaged by the 7/7 bombings in London, Elena Piras is no stranger to barriers being placed in her way.

Yet even the challenge of a foreign language could not stop her singing - and, having mastered English, she learned Gaelic to enable her to compete in the Royal National Mod.

Now the singer, who came to the UK at the age of 18, is a national star after win-

**'I only started learning a year ago'**

ning the Margot Campbell Trophy at this year's Mod in Dunoon, Argyll.

Miss Piras, who sings everything from folk and jazz to classical, studied Gaelic for a year to reach the high standard necessary to qualify for the competition.

She edged her way to a narrow win at Dunoon by a single point from Jennifer Campbell, of Glasgow, and Wendy MacKay, from Sutherland. Miss Piras attended three

By **Bill Heaney**

courses at the Gaelic college in Skye to help her with the Gaelic language and the singing.

She said: 'In order to compete, I had to pass a language test for which I got a Silver Card.

'There are eight levels and I got up to seven. Level eight is only given to very fluent Gaelic speakers, which I am not yet as I only started learning the language a year ago.

'I'd wanted to learn Gaelic simply to gain independence in reading it for my singing, but then I got interested in the language and loved learning it.'

In Dunoon, Miss Piras reached the final of the Silver Pendant contest, the highest accolade for which a non-native Gaelic speaker can be considered.


The singer, who travelled to the Mod from her home in Pitlochry, Perthshire, was left with chronic tinnitus after being caught up in

the London bombings in 2005. In 2006, she moved to Edinburgh and later to Glasgow but she found the city too busy and too noisy since the explosion had left her with tinnitus.

'I moved to Pitlochry, where it is much quieter and I like that very much,' she said. 'I have now released my debut album, Journey, and I am constantly on the lookout for gigs and opportunities to perform and make some money.'



Overcoming obstacles: Mod winner Elena Piras

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