

BRAVE ELENA'S MOD

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APITLOCHRY singer travelled to Dunoon by public transport on her own and won the Margot Campbell Trophy at the Royal National Mòd. Elena Piras' story is one of remarkable courage - she is blind.

The Sardinia-born singer studied hard for 12 months to learn the Gaelic language before entering for the Mòd.

Elena told the *Standard*: "I really enjoyed singing at the Mòd. It's a shame the weather was so bad on the day. I didn't really spend long in Dunoon mainly because of the weather.

"I was up at 4.30 on the morning of the competitions. I had spent the night before in Kikintilloch with a friend in order to be on time for a 9am start in Dunoon.

"After my performances in the morning I travelled back to Gourock and checked into my hotel, where I spent some time resting before travelling back across the water to sing at the final for the Silver Pendant.

"After the event I had to rush back to the ferry terminal, as Argyll Ferries were cancelling the last boat scheduled



Elena Piras - Photo: Lorna McNiven

to travel on Wednesday night. I was very lucky to be able to get help by volunteers at the Mòd, who very kindly offered me a lift to the port.

"The Argyll Ferries staff arranged for me to have a taxi waiting for me to take me to where I needed to be. It's not easy being blind. Dunoon is a strange unknown place to me and if I want to get around independently, often using a taxi is the only way to do it."

Elena told us how she studied at Gealic college *Sobhal Mor Ostaig* on Skye, and her tutor Rosamma McPhee came to her Pitlochry home once a year.

The singer con-

tinued: "The homework however, I had to do myself with no support from anyone, nor materials in large print or Braille. This took many long hours of hard tiring work for both my eyes and my neck. Sometimes it would take me an hour to find a word in the dictionary. The songs, as well, had to be transcribed into Braille, which I also did myself at home with my Braille on my lap and my head stuck in a song sheet."

Elena is no stranger to adversity. In addition to being blind from birth, her hearing was damaged when she was caught up in the 7/7 London terrorist bombings seven

years ago.

It was after this that Elena decided to concentrate on being a successful singer/songwriter, despite the bombing leaving her with tinnitus.

She said: "I moved to Pitlochry, where it is much quieter and I like that very much. I have now released my debut album 'Journey', and I am constantly on the look out for gigs and opportunities to perform.

"My house is right opposite a little burn, which is lovely and calms me down and helps with my tinnitus as its white noise."

Elena's bravery should be an inspiration to us all.