

Famous opera singer shares her voice with talented autistic students

World renowned mezzo soprano Sophia Grech, who was diagnosed with autism in 2015, has been giving singing workshops at the specialist Portfield School where she is an Ambassador.

The opera singer is a regular visitor at the school in Parley, which provides specialist education for autistic students aged four-19 and is operated by the charity Autism Unlimited.

Sophia said: “I was aware of a number of talented young singers at Portfield School and so I was delighted to present singing workshops.

“It’s been wonderful to see the students’ progress, both in their confidence and singing techniques. I can see how much these talented students really love to sing and it’s amazing how quickly they have advanced. It has been a very moving and personal experience.”

Sophia was diagnosed with autism at the age of 45 after struggling throughout her school and adult life with social interaction.

When she was eight years old, she saw an opera singer on television and realised she could make similar sounds.

“I used this to my advantage, immersing myself in the sounds and the music, pretending I was making the sounds of instruments through my voice. This was soothing and calming for me and helped to suppress the daily anxiety and frustration that school caused,” she explained.

“Growing up I can honestly say I found my voice through singing. I struggled to understand language, but musical language felt natural for me, and I would sing as a way to communicate. So, I feel passionate about promoting the concept that singing can help autistic individuals, especially those who are naturally gifted with a brilliant voice.”

Sophia, who is British/Maltese, is busy giving performances and guest appearances worldwide. She recently returned from the launch of her book entitled *'I Wish I Could Sing'*, in Malta. The book was first published in 2020 by Olympia and was most recently published and launched by the Maltese Central Government (Ministry for Inclusion and Voluntary Organisations), which has appointed her as its Ambassador for Autism.

Siún Cranny, CEO of Autism Unlimited said: “Sophia’s talent and personal experience of autism is hugely inspiring to everyone at Portfield School. It was captivating to hear her singing with some of our students and I know this will have a lasting and positive effect on them.

“Enjoying the arts and exploring our students’ many talents, whether through our music, singing and dance lessons, our theatre performances, concerts or regular

talent shows, is integral to life here at Portfield School and we look forward to seeing our very own opera singer emerging into the limelight in the coming years.”

Ends.

Picture captions:

Mezzo soprano Sophia Grech, who was diagnosed with autism in 2015 at the age of 45. has been giving singing workshops at Autism Unlimited’s Portfield School in Parley, Christchurch, where she is an Ambassador. She is seen in these two pictures with Portfield School students Ava and Willow.

www.autism-unlimited.org

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