

Nafset Chenib — Press Biography

Operatic and Crossover Soprano · Voice Educator · Musicologist — Third-person biography for presenters, journalists, and program notes. Two lengths provided below.

Short Biography

Dr. Nafset Chenib is a Circassian operatic and crossover soprano, voice educator, and musicologist. Born to a Circassian family in the Republic of Adygea, in the North-West Caucasus, she began her musical life as a member of the UNESCO Children's Choir, singing for Pope John Paul II at the Vatican. Her international career has included collaborations with orchestras such as the Evgeny Svetlanov State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia, the Bolshoi Theater's Chamber Orchestra, and the Baden-Baden Philharmonic, and reached a career highlight when she headlined the closing ceremony of the XI Winter Paralympics in Sochi (2014) alongside José Carreras. In 2021, she became the first blind soprano to sing the title role of the blind princess in Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta*. She is also one of very few singers able to perform in the Circassian language, a rare skill she brought to the stage at the Circassian Culture Days in Munich, Germany (April 2026). She has performed at prestigious venues including the United Nations in Geneva and New York, the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, the Grand Hall of the Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory, the Tchaikovsky Hall of the Moscow State Philharmonic, the Leyla Gencer Opera and Arts Center in Istanbul, the Tonhalle Zürich, and Teatro Massimo di Cagliari in Italy. She holds a PhD in Musicology (2024, awarded with distinction) from the Graduate Center, City University of New York, where her dissertation examined representations of blindness in nineteenth-century opera.

Long Biography

Dr. Nafset Chenib is a Circassian operatic and crossover soprano, voice educator, and musicologist whose repertoire spans opera, sacred music, art song, musical theater, and film scores. Born to a Circassian family in the Republic of Adygea, in the North-West Caucasus, she began her musical life as a member of the UNESCO Children's Choir, singing for Pope John Paul II at the Vatican.

Her international performing career has included collaborations with world-class orchestras such as the Evgeny Svetlanov State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia under conductor Lev Kontorovich, the Bolshoi Theater's Chamber Orchestra under conductor Aleksey Petrov, the Baden-Baden Philharmonic under conductor Manfred Obrecht, the Musica Viva Chamber Orchestra under conductors Alexander Rudin and Marius Stravinsky, and the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra under Alexander Titov. Her career reached a highlight when she headlined the XI Winter Paralympics closing ceremony in Sochi (2014), alongside José Carreras. From 2021 to 2022, she served as Leading Soloist with the St. Petersburg State Philharmonic for Children and Youth, performing with the International Taurida Symphony and the Leningrad Oblast State Symphony Orchestra under conductor Mikhail Golikov. During this appointment, she became the first blind soprano to sing the title role of the blind princess in

Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta*, in a 2021 semi-staged performance at the International Choral Festival, Ivangorod Fortress.

From 2015 to 2017, she appeared as a soloist and guest performer at the Chekhov Moscow Art Theater, in the role of a singer in Alexander Ostrovsky's *Truth Is Good but Happiness Is Better*, and in 2015 was featured as soloist performing "Interiorization III" at the New European Theater XXI festival, held at Moscow's Garage Museum of Modern Art. In 2021, she served as Head of the Jury Panel, Music Category, for the All-Russian Inclusive Creative Competition "Access is Open." Beyond the classical stage, Dr. Chenib is one of very few professionally trained singers able to perform in the Circassian language. For example, in April 2026, she brought this rare ability to the Circassian Culture Days in Munich ("Tscherkessische Kulturtage München"), organized by the Circassian Cultural Association Munich e.V., where she performed a recital of Circassian songs for the Circassian diaspora of Europe.

She has performed at many prestigious venues and institutions, among them the United Nations in Geneva and the United Nations Headquarters in New York, the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, Moscow's International House of Music, the Grand Hall of the Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory, the Tchaikovsky Hall of the Moscow State Philharmonic, the Leyla Gencer Opera and Arts Center in Istanbul, the Tonhalle Zürich, Teatro Massimo di Cagliari in Italy, and the Solomon Mikowsky and Greenfield Recital Halls at the Manhattan School of Music, among others across Russia, Europe, and the United States.

Dr. Chenib holds a PhD in Musicology (2024, awarded with distinction) from the Graduate Center, City University of New York, where her dissertation, advised by Joseph N. Straus, examined representations of blindness in nineteenth-century opera, at the intersection of music, society, and disability studies. She completed postgraduate vocal studies at the Mozarteum University in Salzburg under Allison Oakes, and earlier trained at the Manhattan School of Music under Maitland Peters. She holds a dual Master's degree from the Victor Popov Academy of Choral Arts in Moscow — in Vocal Performance and in Voice Pedagogy, under Tatiana Baykova — and a Bachelor of Music from the Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov Musical College in Krasnodar, under Ivan Shulzhevsky. She has also participated in masterclasses with Mirella Freni, Jennifer Larmore, and Reiner Weiss.

Dr. Chenib also presents lecture-recitals blending academic inquiry with vocal performance, most recently at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York (April 2025), where she delivered a lecture-recital on women composers of the Western classical canon. She is a specialist diction coach in English, German, Italian, and Russian, and brings an inclusive, Universal-Design-for-Learning approach to all of her teaching — from lecture-recitals and private studio instruction to her undergraduate and graduate courses at Hunter College and, since 2026, her work as Voice Faculty at the Filomen M. D'Agostino Greenberg Music School in New York, teaching classical voice to blind and visually impaired students.

Dr. Chenib's honors include Second Prize at the VI Georgy Sviridov International Competition of Vocal Chamber Music and the Pablo Casals Award for Music Accomplishment and Human Endeavor from the Manhattan School of Music (2018), one of only twenty-five awardees that year among roughly four hundred graduates. She also received a Certificate of Recognition

from the California Department of Education for a solo concert performance in Sacramento (2017), the American Musicological Society's Greater New York Chapter Annual Student Paper Prize (2022), the Philanthropist International Award for Outstanding Achievements in Performing Arts (2015), the Nikolay Ostrovsky International Award for Courage, Fortitude and Creative Success (2014), and the Victor Popov Award for Academic Excellence and Creative Potential (2012). In 2015, she was named Honored Artist of the Republic of Adygea by presidential decree, its youngest-ever recipient. Her recording *Bestowing Light*, with the International Taurida Symphony, is available on all major streaming platforms.