

# The Proms King

Clockwise from right: an IDTA dancer. Photograph courtesy of the IDTA  
The ISTD National GC Awards: Mexico. Photograph © Instill  
Summertime at the RAH. Photograph © Sheila Burnett

Clockwise from below right:  
an ISTD Cecchetti classical ballet dancer,  
ISTD hip hop dancers. Both photographs courtesy of the ISTD  
ISTD tap dancers. Photograph © Elaine Mayson  
Dance Proms logo

Christopher Nourse, project manager of the highly anticipated Dance Proms, tells Marianka Swain about the rewards and difficulties of pioneering a new festival

On Sunday November 13, a Royal Albert Hall audience will bear witness to Britain's first ever Dance Proms ([www.danceproms.co.uk](http://www.danceproms.co.uk)). Getting it off the ground has been no mean feat, involving the careful management of partner organisations the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD), the International Dance Teachers Association (IDTA), the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) and the Royal Albert Hall.

However, project manager Christopher Nourse has relished the challenge. "I've always had a strong interest in promoting the arts, dance in particular," he

explains. "Dance Proms has given me an opportunity to work within a familiar environment, but also explore new areas, such as the project's unique online aspect."

Christopher has extensive experience to draw upon, having been chief executive of Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet, Rambert Dance Company and English National Ballet, as well as working for many years at the Royal Opera House, and he's proud to be part of the team creating a new celebration of dance.

"All art forms have to be relevant to the age in which we live. Dance Proms is our way of publicly paying tribute to the

outstanding – and longstanding – contribution of this country's dedicated dance teachers and students, but also making dance available to a wider audience through our online platform."

In an exciting departure from traditional arts projects, all entries to Dance Proms have been made via the event's website, with dance teachers asked to film their students' performances and submit videos online. "It's always a gamble, trying out a new system," admits Christopher. "But, apart from a few requests for help, it's all gone very smoothly; generally, participants have found it much easier than

they thought they would.

"All videos have been filmed from the front, so it's the dance routines that are judged rather than the camera work, and our partner WebPlay, an innovative arts education charity whose activities combine technology and the performing arts, designed a very simple process for us – if you can use email, you can follow the online steps without any difficulty."

Through WebPlay, Dance Proms issues a monthly ebook, allowing people to follow the development of the project as it unfolds. Such transparency will almost certainly appeal to

those who consider the dance world somewhat inaccessible, and Christopher hopes that giving people a say in who participates will also prove attractive. "We have an expert panel of six judges, two from each of the three dance organisations, who will whittle down the entries to a final shortlist. The public will then be invited to view a selection of the shortlisted videos online and vote for the act they want to see included in the final programme. You can visit the Dance Proms website any time between June 1 and June 11 to vote for your favourite – we can't wait to find out who

the people's choice will be."

It won't be an easy decision, as the range of entries is enormous, notes Christopher. "Dance Proms is proving incredibly diverse, both geographically, with videos sent in from all over the country, and artistically, covering everything from belly dancing, tap and classical pas de deux to ballroom, South Asian and street dance – all the genres championed by the IDTA, ISTD and RAD."

Dance Proms is the brainchild of the three organisations that aim to use the talents of their teachers and students to promote dance, just as the Music for Youth Schools Proms promotes music. ▶

Below, Juvenile ballroom.  
Photograph © Ron Self  
Right, dancers of the ISTD.  
Both photographs  
courtesy of the ISTD



*"In an exciting departure from traditional arts projects, all entries to Dance Proms have been made via the event's website, with dance teachers asked to film their students' performances and submit videos online"*

"We're hoping to get a similar audience atmosphere at our event," explains Christopher. "The Albert Hall can be an intimidating arena, but the wonderful thing about the Schools Music Proms is that each act has a dedicated section of the audience cheering them on. It would be great to see friends, family and the general public lending the same support to the Dance Proms performers."

As well as the final performance, there is another equally valuable opportunity for the participants: "We want Dance Proms to be a shared experience, from start to finish. The acts that make the final selection in June will be given access to top professionals, as well as to each other, via a specially created chatroom, allowing for

an interflow of conversations. The performers can ask the professionals questions and learn from their experience, as well as from each other.

"Dance Proms is all about breaking down barriers and encouraging more open communication, so we can strengthen our emerging talent and help shape a wider dance community. This is the first time these three organisations have collaborated, so it should create a unique experience for all involved. We're so pleased there's been such tremendous support from industry professionals and are thrilled that Karen Hardy, Chris Hollins and Wayne Sleep are among our patrons."

Christopher hopes Dance Proms will galvanise support for dance in Britain, particularly among the younger generation. "We've seen huge strides forward in recent years, but we can always do more. Youth Dance England, founded by the Arts Council [but sadly a casualty of their recent cuts], has done a wonderful job over the past eight years of encouraging kids to dance, setting up regional support groups and celebrating the best amateur talent in its annual festival.

"It would be great to see Dance Proms become an annual event that provides a similar opportunity for teachers and students to showcase the outcome of their work, allowing the public to see how dedicated and talented they really are."

Bottom and below, *Summertime* at the RAH.  
Photographs © Sheila Burnett



An ISTD freestyle dancer.  
Photograph courtesy of ISTD



Such a showcase could provide a crucial contribution to the future of dance in this country, believes Christopher: "Historically, dance has always been the poor relation of the performing arts, and the cuts have affected it more than other forms.

"Dance Proms would not have been possible without the joint contribution of our three partner organisations and the Albert Hall [into whose Learning and Participation remit Dance Proms neatly falls] and – crucially – the support of private sponsorship; we don't have any government backing. I hope the event shows individuals and organisations how rewarding it can be to sponsor talented youngsters, and that both Dance Proms and other dance projects benefit

from their generosity in future. "We'd love to expand the scope of Dance Proms beyond the UK, but that depends on the success of our first year. It's all up to the public now to get online, get involved, turn up at the Albert Hall on November 13 and make it the event they want."

Dance Proms' multimedia platform, which has created a unique online dance festival, has given Christopher a very new experience, but those involved have only confirmed his long-held views on the dance world: "The professionalism and commitment I've encountered is typical of all those involved in the dance sector. I'm sure the final performance, taking place in one of Britain's most iconic landmarks, will be both inspiring and inspired,

and the range of work, the scale of the event and the life-affirming enthusiasm of these talented young people will truly make it a night to remember." ●

### *Dance Proms needs you!*

- **Visit** [www.danceproms.co.uk](http://www.danceproms.co.uk) and check out the monthly ebook
- **Vote** any time between June 1 and June 11, via the website, for the act you want to see perform at the Royal Albert Hall (RAH)
- **Buy** tickets from June 9 through the RAH box office or website (0845 401 5045; [www.royalalberthall.com/tickets](http://www.royalalberthall.com/tickets))
- **Cheer** dancers on at the RAH on November 13!