



A night to remember

Marianka Swain reports on the Dance Proms

Remembrance Sunday 2011 saw the debut of a very special event. The first-ever Dance Proms, which we highlighted in the June issue, welcomed to the Royal Albert Hall 24 groups of dance students in a variety of styles, from ballroom and tap to street and bharata natyam. The lucky performers were selected from hundreds of entries, submitted online, and the diverse styles reflected event partners the International Dance Teachers' Association, the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing and the Royal Academy of Dance.

As well as the energetic and impressively accomplished student numbers, the 2,500-strong audience was treated to special performances by luminaries such as Darren Bennett and Lilia Kopylova and Royal Ballet principals Marianela Nuñez and Thiago Soares. The audience itself was star-studded, with high-profile industry figures including Wayne Sleep, Dame

Beryl Grey, Karen Hardy, Mark Summers, Sir Peter Wright, Kevin O'Hare, Jack Petchey, Lady MacMillan and Bonnie Langford.

Performing in front of that audience was extraordinary, recalled 16-year-old Louise Pucher, who danced Latin with Maidstone's Margaret Preedy Dance Studios: "We've been to Blackpool Tower, but walking out on that stage was something else. It really lifted our performance, having all those people watching and even singing along – we just went for it.

"It was great getting to know the other performers; we're used to just interacting with ballroom dancers. We shared a dressing room with these incredible ballet dancers – we kept telling them how amazing they were, and they thought what we did was amazing! And I was starstruck by Darren and Lilia – I can't believe I danced on the same stage as them.

"But the best part was sharing the experience with my

fellow students – we're really good friends outside of class and we wanted to make our teacher proud. She doesn't take anyone for granted and she works out how to teach each individual. We would never have had this once-in-a-lifetime experience if it wasn't for her."

Organiser Christopher Nourse said: "Dance Proms was an extraordinary achievement, bearing in mind that the 400-plus performers, their 30 teachers and choreographers, the 50 production and backstage staff and the Royal Albert Hall staff only met for the first time mid-morning. Their commitment, enthusiasm and sheer hard work (they essentially did seven days' work in seven hours) produced a brilliant performance of which they can be immensely proud."

Dance Proms patron Wayne Sleep agreed, adding: "This has surely paved the way for an annual event bringing all the dance styles together, at last!" ●