

What to choose at Proms 2018

SUSAN PORTER



CLARE PARK



The two Graces, Davidson (left) and Durham (right)

Did you know that public booking for this year's Proms at St Jude's festival, which runs from June 23 to July 1, is now open?

The launch reception, with cellist Joely Koos, took place at the end of March. Tickets are now going fast for this music and literary extravaganza held at the centre of the Suburb, so make sure you order yours before it's too late.

STARS

The centrepiece of Proms of course is its music. And what a great offering there is this year.

As well as stars such as the Aurora Orchestra, which sold out its BBC Proms appearance, favourite Nevill Holt Opera, performing The Marriage of Figaro, and the chart-topping Kanneh-Mason Piano Trio, our local Proms is presenting a wide variety of really excellent concerts.

Whether or not you're a Gilbert & Sullivan regular, you're bound to enjoy HMS Pinafore, being brought to the Suburb by Charles Court Opera. This is one of the leading chamber opera and music theatre companies in the UK, and has been described as providing, "A sparkling fresh package of laughs, pathos, foolery and high-class music making".

If you'd like to try something different, you're in for a treat with the Septura Brass Septet. Septura's members are the leading players of the new generation of British brass musicians, holding principal positions in major UK orchestras. They aim to re-cast the brass ensemble as a serious artistic medium, and at Proms they will be performing arrangements of works by Handel, Prokofiev and Stravinsky.

Jazz fans will love the effervescent Jacqui Dankworth, playing 'A Touch of Cabaret' with Counterpoise, featuring Suburb resident and trumpeter, Deborah Calland. And for a fun Saturday night, don't miss the tribute to Bob Dylan, which can be combined with Proms first-ever late night stand-up comedy in a special offer deal.

AMAZING GRACE(S)

Two home-grown singers are gracing Proms this year – each one a Grace.

The first, Davidson, is an internationally known soprano who was brought up in the Suburb and at St Jude's, and will be performing with the Academy of Ancient Music in the first live performance of works from her new CD, including pieces by Handel and Vivaldi. It promises to be a really special evening. In the words of composer and conductor, Eric Whitacre: "Grace Davidson has one of the most beautiful and pure soprano voices on earth."

The second, Durham, is a mezzo-soprano who was formerly a chorister at St Jude's. Having sung with the Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera and Glyndebourne Festival Opera, she will appear with the Covent Garden Chamber Orchestra on the Last Night, when the flags come out and the sea shanties and hymns raise the roof.

MAX IMPACT

Another coup is to have two members of one Suburb family open and close Proms. While the well-known cellist and musical director, Robert Max, will conduct on the Last Night, his son, Noah, a graduate of the

Purcell School of Music, will be conducting the Echo Ensemble, which he founded, in the first lunchtime concert. "I am very proud," said Wendy Max, mother and grandmother of the two respectively.

Free lunchtime concerts will be taking place all week and, as an innovation, a special family-friendly performance of Carnival of the Animals will be held at 3pm on the final Sunday of the Festival – 1 July.

LITFEST

If you're interested in books, the LitFest on the first weekend – 23 and 24 June – offers the chance to see some great writers from the worlds of politics, theatre, music and broadcasting.

Viv Groskop bridges several of those worlds. A broadcaster and stand-up comedian, she will be talking to Ham & High features editor Bridget Galton about her new book, The Anna Karenina Fix, a tongue-in-cheek memoir which compares her own problems with those of famous literary characters.

Two more well-known names from TV and radio will be appearing. ITV pundit, Robert Peston, will be in conversation with Suburb scion, Simon Lewis, about his book, WTF: What Have We Done? And John Tusa, who became Managing Director of the BBC World Service before running the Barbican Centre, will be discussing his memoir, Making A Noise, with BBC presenter and Proms patron, Sue MacGregor.

You can also see former National Theatre director, Nick Hytner; Tony Blair's speechwriter,



(l-r) Richard Clegg Chairman of Proms; Joely Koos; Barnet Mayor Cllr. Brian Salinger; Susie Gregson, Proms CEO

Philip Collins; Aurora Orchestra co-founder, Clemency Burton-Hill; columnist Simon Jenkins; and famous grammarian, Lynne Truss, who has just had her first crime novel published.

As a little incentive, Proms is offering free tea or coffee and home-made cake in its delightful LitFest café if you book tickets for at least three events on Saturday, 23 June or on Sunday, 24 June.

WALKS

Even if you've lived in the area for years, you'll get to know the Suburb and its surroundings much better through the Heritage Walks on offer – all led by experts in their field.

For example, English Heritage volunteer guide Tamara Rabin will be leading a walk through Kenwood, making links with landscape depictions in the House's collection.

Thomas Radice, Heath & Hampstead Society Trustee, will be tracing the homes of famous inhabitants of Hampstead Heath and the Suburb in his walk

starting at the café in Golders Hill Park.

And Lester Hillman, urban planner, lecturer and accredited guide, will lead a tour to uncover 'intrigue and spies in Belsize'.

These are just three of nine walks that will take place between Monday, 25 June and Sunday, 1 July.

FANFARE

Education is an important part of Proms' mission, and 11 schools from the local area will be taking part this year in the Schools Prom. They will be performing 'From the Impressionists' Room at the National Gallery' – music inspired by famous paintings by Monet, Rousseau and van Gogh.

Proms is also running a 'Fantastic Fanfares' composing competition for young people aged 14-18, who are invited to compose a fanfare lasting between 20 and 30 seconds. The winning piece will be performed on the Last Night.

Another competition – this time for young people from three schools in East London, challenging them to write a piece of poetry inspired by the music and themes from the Marriage of Figaro – will see winners read out their entries in front of the Proms audience. This has been made possible through the generosity of Proms' principal sponsor, Investec, working with Toynbee Hall, one of the two charities to which Proms donates its surplus.

"It's a privilege to have the chance to introduce young people to classical music in this way," said Niamh O'Donnell-Keenan, Proms Trustee, "and a wonderful way of keeping up the connection with the Suburb."

For more details on the events and competitions, and to book tickets (including concessions for under-25s), go to www.promsatstjudes.org.uk.

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Father and son Robert (above) and Noah (below) Max



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