

# A hot year for Proms at St Jude's

MICHAEL ELEFTHERADES



Proms founder, Susie Gregson at the Last Night of the Proms

What an outstanding season! Not only did the sun shine throughout the Proms at St Jude's 2018 festival, but there was also a spirit of success and enjoyment that was hard to beat.

## MEMORABLE

There were many memorable moments. The Kanneh-Mason Trio – comprising the Royal Wedding performer Sheku on cello, sister Isata on piano and brother Braimah on violin – playing not only to a packed church but also to a picnicking crowd of 250 on Central Square. Dame Henrietta Barnett would surely have been delighted to see the centrepiece of her garden suburb creation used so productively and with so much entertainment.

The Aurora Orchestra, who played Mozart's Symphony No. 40 from memory, astonished the audience by creating a magical 'surround-sound' experience, when they fanned out among the aisles of the church to perform their encore.

The Simply Dylan concert led to dancing in the aisles – something seen rarely in St Jude's, but a testament to the exuberance of the music from John O'Connell and his band.

Sopranos ruled supreme this year. Sky Ingram as the Countess and Aoife Miskelly as Susanna in Nevill Holt Opera's Marriage

of Figaro, and then the Suburb's own Grace Davidson singing Vivaldi and Handel with the Academy of Ancient Music, were all exhilarating to listen to, with the clarity and purity of their renditions.

## VARIETY

Jacqui Dankworth and Counterpoise entertained with a great evening of jazz, singing and playing arrangements by pianist Iain Farrington that were lively and original. Charles Court Opera offered a well-produced HMS Pinafore, and the Septura Brass Septet showed how well-known pieces could be successful when scored for trumpet, trombone and tuba.

As always, the Last Night went down a storm, with flag-waving and hearty audience participation singing Land of Hope and Glory, Rule Britannia and Jerusalem. Soloist Grace Durham – a former St Jude's chorister – ably led the revels alongside conductor Robert Max, whose son Noah had taken the baton at the opening lunchtime concert of the festival a week earlier.

## LUNCHTIME

Something that makes Proms special is its running of free lunchtime concerts – made possible through the generous support of the Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association. These provide a platform for young, up-and-coming stars and wonderful entertainment for all ages.

Asagi Nakata gave a particularly impressive piano recital, and Milo Harper lived up to his name with the recital that he had been awarded through winning the 2018 Camac Harp Competition.

## YOUNG PEOPLE

Proms is increasingly developing its education offering. This year, the schools concert, inspired by art from the Impressionists' room at the National Gallery, involved about 300 children from 10 local schools. Alongside this, Proms ran two Teeny

Proms events for under 5-year olds to get a taste of close-up live music and participation; a family concert for primary school children, where they could dress up in animal face masks and listen to Carnival of the Animals; a Fantastic Fanfares competition for 14-18 year old budding composers; and a spoken word competition, supported by Proms principal sponsor, Investec, open to young people from schools in East London working with one of Proms' target charities, Toynbee Hall.

Theo Gill, 17, won the fanfare prize, presented by Robert Max, and had the privilege of hearing his winning entry played – twice – by the Covent Garden Chamber Orchestra on Proms' Last Night.

Nicole Barrios, Henoc Lingomba and Volkan O'Grady were chosen by a panel of judges from Investec, Toynbee Hall and Proms at St Jude's as winners of the spoken word competition, and read out their winning entries in front of a Proms audience of 500 at the Kanneh-Mason Trio concert.

"Our aim was to offer something for each age group and to ensure work of quality and character, hoping that the children and young people's experiences could be something lasting and meaningful," said Michelle Groves, Proms Trustee. "In an age when children see so much of the world through a small screen, we hope that a visit to Proms gave them 'live' inspiration and an insight into the world of musicians, music making and the delight of being an audience."

## LITFEST

The Proms Literary Festival took place with seven events across the first weekend. The biggest audiences were for ITV political editor, Robert Peston – interviewed by former Prime Ministerial spokesman Simon Lewis – and former National Theatre Director, Nick Hytner, interviewed by journalist Nicolette Jones.

Other sessions by authors who were a little less well-known turned out, as often is the case, to be at least as fascinating. Radio Three breakfast presenter Clemency Burton-Hill explained how she had chosen the 366 pieces of music contained in her book *Year of Wonder*, and played some extracts from the complementary Spotify playlist. Former Times editor Simon Jenkins used a slideshow to take us on a whistle-stop tour around his 100 favourite railway stations, and journalist Viv Groskop set out how her surname had led to her fascination with Russia and its literature. Lynne Truss shook off her reputation for grammatical stringency and amused audiences with her comic detective novel set in Brighton in 1957.

All this took place around the most congenial LitFest café stocked with homemade goodies supplied by Proms volunteers. Sitting in the shade of the trees in the Henrietta Barnett School yard, sipping a cup of tea and nibbling a Florentine while musing over the pages of the new paperback just purchased from West End Lane Books and signed by the author was indeed a luxurious experience.

## EXERCISE

But Proms at St Jude's is not all about sitting down. Enthusiasts were able to delight in as many as nine Heritage walks this year – all under sunny skies – led by individual volunteer guides, whose commitment, awe-inspiring depth of knowledge and enthusiasm were palpable.

Walkers trod the streets of Belsize Park uncovering 'intrigue and spies'; visited Toynbee Hall to look at the work of philanthropists in the East End; and surveyed the 'revolutionary' modernist homes of Hampstead. The other walks all took place in and around the Suburb and Hampstead Heath, proving how many hidden corners you can discover in your own area however long you may have lived here.

## INNOVATION

Not letting the grass grow under its feet, Proms is always trying something new. This year, there was pizza before the concert on the last Saturday and stand-up comedy to follow. That it was described as 'late-night' comedy was called into question by MC Jim Daly – but he accepted that finishing by 11.15pm was indeed past the Ovaltine hour in this part of the world.

## CHARITY

Central to Proms is its raising of funds for good causes. Speakers for the two beneficiary charities, Toynbee Hall and the North London Hospice, set out to audiences over the course of the festival how their support would take effect – from instilling self-esteem in previously withdrawn teenagers to providing solace and comfort to individuals at the end of their life and their families and friends.

On two occasions, generous donors doubled the cash collected in buckets at exits at the end of the



evening, adding to the sums that Proms will be able to contribute. "Our cautious Treasurer estimates that it will be at least £45,000 this year," said Proms founder Susie Gregson. "Our thanks go to our sponsors, advertisers, Friends and to you, the audience, for making this possible."

RON FINLAY



Mike Freer MP and the Mayor of Barnet, Councillor Reuben Thompstone



The sun sets on another successful Proms – cheers!

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