

Proms at St Jude's 2021 return of the Live Festival

RON FINLAY

After an online-only appearance in 2020, Proms at St Jude's returned live to Central Square this year. And what a joy it was! Both for the performers and audience alike.

There was palpable excitement from Jess Gillam and her Ensemble on the opening night, which marked the beginning of her live tour in 2021. For Philippe Sands, too, who talked eloquently about *The Ratline*, it was his first talk in front of a live audience since his book was published in April 2020.

Covid restrictions meant changes to format: concerts were socially distanced and held without an interval, but repeated in early and later evening; and LitFest events were streamed online as well as live. But these changes were not without their merits. Sightlines in St Jude's were excellent, the concert audience could attend early or late

depending on their preference and people could take part in LitFest talks from their armchairs or in person.

Sadly, the usual lunchtime concerts and catering tents were absent, but all being well these will return next year.

Pandemic worries meant that audience sizes were about two-thirds of a normal year, but the live events were easily up to their usual standard. Braimah and Konya Kanneh-Mason, violinist and pianist siblings from the famous family, sold out their two concerts. Meanwhile, their mother, Kadiatu, was a hit at LitFest, talking to Ham & High Features Editor Bridget Galton about raising musical prodigies, as told in *House of Music*.

One of the stand-out musical performances was from baritone Roderick Williams, who wowed audiences with his masterful renditions of English songs from the first half of the twentieth century. Similarly, Voces8, the a

cappella ensemble, proved their versatility with a programme from Purcell to Porter. As one ticket holder said, "the Church is wonderful for unaccompanied voices".

Proms audiences were also treated to arias from Hampstead Garden Opera, jazz from the Chris Ingham Quintet, solo piano from Leon McCawley, chamber music from the London Bridge Trio and a wonderful Last Night performed by Fantasia Orchestra. For families, the Magnard Ensemble entertained on a Roald Dahl theme and infants were captivated at two Teeny Proms. A Schools' Prom was produced as an online resource this year, reaching over 4,000 children.

At LitFest, the pairings of authors and interviewers were first-class and the range of topics provided something for everyone, from surgery in war zones and the effects of Indian partition on families to the perils of the digital age and the death of Robert



Jess Gillam (Photo: Michael Eleftheriades)



Roderick Williams (Photo: Michael Eleftheriades)

Maxwell. A coup was a special online interview by Mark Lawson with Dame Hilary Mantel, winner of the David Cohen Prize for Literature and twice winner of the Booker Prize.

Heritage Walks took participants not only around the Suburb, Hampstead and the Heath but also to Whitechapel and Shakespeare's London.

Despite the complications of Covid, it was gratifying that Proms was still able to raise many tens of thousands of pounds for its partner charities, Toynbee Hall and the North London Hospice. None of this would have been possible without the generosity of sponsors, Friends, advertisers and you, the audience. A big thank you to everyone.

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