

ROYAL ACADEMY OF DANCE

Artist Zi Ling wins Royal Academy of Dance portrait competition

Portrait commission awarded to visual artist Zi Ling for her bold, contemporary take on ballet pioneer and RAD founder Dame Adeline Genée



- Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) announces winner of portrait competition to celebrate opening of brand-new global headquarters in Spring 2022.
- Visual artist Zi Ling has been selected as the winner of the portrait competition from entrants from across the UK.
- Over 60 proposals were submitted, each capturing the artists' creative responses to capturing the likeness of founding RAD President and ballet pioneer Dame Adeline Genée.
- A judging panel of singer song-writer Sophie Ellis-Bextor, alongside leading royal portraitist Ralph Heimans and Shevelle Dynott, former English National Ballet dancer and RAD President Dame Darcey Bussell helped select the winning work.
- Zi Ling will now create the large-scale portrait of RAD founding member Dame Adeline Genée, to be unveiled in the brand-new building in Summer 2022.

5 May 2022: Today the Royal Academy of Dance announces the winner of its portrait competition, launched to celebrate the opening of its brand-new global headquarters this year.

Artists from across the UK were asked to submit a portrait proposal of pioneering ballet dancer and founding RAD President Dame Adeline Genée to win a chance to create a final painting to be unveiled in the RAD's new home. Sponsored by historic dance shoemakers

Freed of London, the competition was created to honour the legacy of Dame Adeline's extraordinary contribution to modern British ballet, ensuring that her portrait will be seen and admired by RAD staff, teachers and dancers alike for generations to come.

A judging panel of singer song-writer Sophie Ellis-Bextor, royal portraitist Ralph Heimans and Shevelle Dynott, former English National Ballet Dancer alongside RAD President Dame Darcey Bussell present the winning commission to visual artist Zi Ling, an award-winning member of the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolour. The judges were hugely impressed by the calibre of entries for the competition; however, it was Zi's proposal that really stood out in capturing the essence of Dame Adeline Genée with her bold, expressive, and contemporary interpretation.

Recognition is also given to five shortlisted artists, who were highly commended for their work by the panel of judges, including:

- Caroline Assheton
- Thea Beyleveld
- Sophie Peters
- Abby Hope Skinner
- Siobhan Tate

Founded in 1920 as the Association of Teachers of Operatic Dancing of Great Britain in order to raise the standard of Dance Teaching in the UK, the RAD brought together five of the greatest dance professionals across the principal schools of ballet training (French, Italian, Russian, Danish and British) to form a committee for the reformation of dance teaching. Formed of world-renowned dancers Adeline Genée, Phyllis Bedells, Lucia Cormani and Tamara Karsavina, as well as Edouard Espinosa; the group was tasked to devise a syllabus to form the foundation for a new British standard.

Today, the RAD is a world leader in dance education and training. At the heart of the RAD's work is the belief that the transformative power of dance can enrich, empower, and improve lives, and as such, that everyone should have the opportunity to learn to dance. Having just moved into a new global headquarters in York Road, Battersea, the charity is looking beyond the bricks and mortar toward building lasting relationships with the local community and to deliver their work globally on a larger scale.

Winning artist Zi Ling says: "I am very excited about this wonderful project. As a painter, I specialise in portraits and figurative works – with my favourite subjects being dancers. The spirit of a dancer lies in their movements and rhythm, and I was inspired to paint Dame Adeline because of her distinctive mark on our history and society. In order to capture her beauty as well as her talent, the final portrait will be created in a water-based and pastel medium as a tribute to Degas and his famous ballet dancer paintings".

Tim Arthur, Chief Executive, Royal Academy of Dance says: "Our new headquarters isn't just our home, but what we hope will be a vibrant new cultural destination in London for everybody. I am so pleased we have been able to work outside of our discipline and offer this exciting opportunity to artists across the UK. I was very inspired to see the portrait that Zi Ling will create for us- we will be proud to hang this new and contemporary portrait of one of our founders in our new headquarters for all to enjoy."

Dame Darcey Bussell DBE, President, Royal Academy of Dance says: "I can't think of a more fitting way to mark this new chapter in the RAD's 100+ year history than with this extraordinarily vibrant portrait of founding member Dame Adeline Genée. The judges

were hugely impressed by the exceptional calibre of works submitted from artists up and down the UK – and I can't wait to unveil the new commission from Zi Ling in our brand-new home for dance.”

Panel judge Sophie Ellis-Bextor says: “I am thrilled to have been a part of the panel of judges to help select the winner. There were some really strong contenders for the competition, as shown by our shortlisted artists who were highly commended for their work by the panel. However, it was Zi Ling’s portrait proposal which stood out for her bold use of colour and depiction of Dame Adeline in a thoroughly modern light – a real testament to the legacy of this extraordinary dancer”.

Ralph Heimans, portraitist, says: “What an honour to be a part of this historic competition. With so many strong contenders for the winner of the RAD portrait competition, it was Zi’s proposal that really captured a sense of movement and bowled the judging panel away with her strong use of colour”.

Shevelle Dynott, former English National Ballet dancer, says: “We are delighted to be able to reveal the winner of the RAD portrait competition. Celebrating the extraordinary legacy of one of modern British ballets leading lights, I am sure Dame Adeline would have been thrilled to have her legacy to the world of dance celebrated in this way”.

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Notes to Editors

About the Royal Academy of Dance

Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) is one of the most influential dance education and training organisations in the world with a strong global membership in 85 countries. Established in 1920 to improve standards and re-invigorate dance training, the Academy helps and encourages its teachers to perfect their teaching skills and pass on this knowledge to their students. There are currently over 1,000 students in full-time or part-time teacher training programmes with the Academy and each year the examination syllabus is taught to thousands of young people worldwide, with around a quarter of a million pupils per year going on to take RAD exams.

About Freed of London

Freed of London is the world’s leading designer and manufacturer of professional dance shoes. With an extensive history dating back to 1929, Freed of London shoes are hand crafted in the UK and today the Freed of London portfolio includes dance apparel, bridal and fashion collections.

From humble beginnings in London’s West End, Freed of London was founded by cobbler Frederick Freed in 1929. Working from a basement in Covent Garden, the same site where the brand’s flagship store now stands, Mr Freed and his wife revolutionised

the dance shoe industry by tailoring shoes to a dancer's individual needs. To this day this philosophy remains, and Freed of London shoes continue to be made by hand in the UK.

About winning artist Zi Ling

Zi Ling's early years mainly focused on etching, it which she was fascinated with mark marking of abstract figures. Having trained at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, Chelsea College of Arts and Central Academy of Fine Arts China, Zi Ling now focuses on portrait painting, with watercolour her chosen medium. She observes real-life people and finds emotional moments from photographic images as inspiration. With watercolour, she trusts her intuition before making any marks, feeling that colour is an important way to communicate different personalities and realities through her work.

About Ralph Heimans

British-Australian artist Ralph Heimans (b.1970) is one of today's leading royal portrait artists. His official Diamond Jubilee portrait of HM Queen Elizabeth is in the collection of Westminster Abbey, while his portraits of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh (2017) and HRH The Prince of Wales (2018) are in the Royal Collection.

His large-scale portraits are renowned for their innovative compositions that offer engaging narratives about his subjects and their life stories. His sitters include extraordinary individuals who have made a significant contribution in the fields of arts, academia, law, business, and philanthropy. Their portrayals are informed by a creative integration of subject and context. Figures are placed in complex spatial arrangements, underpinned by an innovative use of geometry, reflection and perspective. His technical approach pays homage to the 17th Century masters of chiaroscuro, exploiting exquisite effects of light, which appear to illuminate the inner world of his subjects.

Heimans' works are held in major international collections including The National Portrait Gallery in Washington, The Royal Collection, Westminster Abbey, The National Portrait Gallery of Australia, The National History Museum of Denmark, Australia's Parliament House and The European Court in Luxembourg. In 2014 he was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia for services to portraiture.

About Sophie Ellis-Bextor

Sophie Ellis-Bextor shot to fame as a vocalist on Spiller's huge number one single, 'Groovejet' and her worldwide smash hit, 'Murder on the Dancefloor'. Her debut solo album, 'Read My Lips', was released in 2001 and sold more than 2 million copies worldwide. Her subsequent album releases include 'Shoot from the Hip' (2003), 'Trip the Light Fantastic' (2007) and 'Make a Scene' (2011). In 2014, Sophie released her album 'Wanderlust' on her own label EBGB's, which was co-written and produced by Ed Harcourt. It proved to be a critical and commercial success spending 3 weeks in the UK top 10 and selling over 100,000 copies.

Sophie followed this release and collaboration with 2016's 'Familia', which saw her return to the dancefloor with her single 'Come With Us'. In January of 2019, with Ed Harcourt as Producer and Amy Langley (of Dirty Pretty Strings) arranging, Sophie released orchestrated versions of all her hits and past single releases with her orchestral greatest hits album 'The Song Diaries'. In 2020, her Kitchen Discos, performed at home during lockdown with her five sons and recorded by her husband, musician Richard Jones, were watched and enjoyed by 40 million around the world. Following the performances, she released her latest album 'Songs From The Kitchen Disco' in late 2020 on Cooking Vinyl, bringing together Sophie's hits with many other songs from her phenomenally

successful lockdown Kitchen Disco performances, garnering further critical acclaim and yet another top 10 UK album chart position.

About Shevelle Dynott

Shevelle Dynott was born in London and started dancing aged seven when he was spotted at his Brixton primary school by scouts for 'Chance to Dance', a scheme which aimed to scout talented inner-city children and expand ballet's reach beyond its traditionally white middle-class base. In 1997, he was the first child to complete the 'Chance to Dance' training and be accepted on the Royal Ballet School's Junior Associates programme. In 2004 Shevelle won a bronze medal in the RAD's Genée International Ballet Competition and upon completing his training in 2005, Dynott joined the English National Ballet as a company artist and has appeared in numerous productions: Akram Khan's *Giselle* Nureyev's *Romeo and Juliet* Macmillan's *Sleeping Beauty*. Shevelle is now a freelance artist and has recently completed a 7-month acting course at identity school of acting in Brixton.

About Dame Darcey Bussell, OBE

Darcey Bussell is a former Principal with The Royal Ballet and the most famous British ballerina of her generation. During her nearly twenty years as a Principal, she won worldwide renown for her unique combination of having a tall and athletic physique whilst dancing with soft lyricism.

Darcey trained at The Royal Ballet School and joined the Company in 1988. She was promoted to Principal in 1989, aged just 20, after the premiere of Kenneth MacMillan's *The Prince of the Pagodas*, in which she had created the lead role. Darcey retired from the Company in June 2007 with a performance of MacMillan's *Song of the Earth*, broadcast live on BBC2. She came out of retirement to dance the 'Spirit of the Flame' at the 2012 London Olympics closing ceremony.

Darcey's extensive broadcast work includes being a judge on *Strictly Come Dancing*, many documentaries for the BBC and she has presented The Royal Ballet's worldwide cinema relays since 2014. She remains a Guest principal coach at The Royal Ballet and is Artist Laureate of the Royal Ballet School.

Her books include *Darcey Bussell: Evolved*, *Darcey Bussell: A Life in Pictures*, the 'Magic Ballerina' children's series and her autobiography. In 2015 she founded DDMIX (diverse dance mix), a dance fitness charity, aimed at getting dance fitness to be part of PE in state schools.

Darcey became the President of the Royal Academy of Dance in 2012.

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