

A Day In The Life Of... A Royal Ballet School pupil

The Royal Ballet School has had its home at White Lodge in Richmond Park since 1955. Each year 12 boys and 12 girls are invited to join the elite band of young dancers whose skill, physique and enthusiasm grant them a place at one of the top three ballet schools in the world

Matthew Ball, 14, is in Year 10 at the school. He first started to dance aged 6, encouraged by his mother – herself a pupil at the school for a year until her height prevented her from continuing. He won his place aged 11.

'The alarm goes off at about 7 o'clock and we have 45 minutes to get our school work and dance kit together before breakfast at 7.45. I share a room with one other boy and all the boys in our year share a block with a communal area with a sofa and TV.

'I found it hard at first to live away from my family in Liverpool - it's weird when you can't give your mum a hug goodnight but it's fine now. I phone them in the evenings and I usually go home every three weeks or so.



'Breakfast is great. We get sausages or bacon and the usual stuff like cereal. The food's pretty good here and we have the freedom to eat what we like but they don't give us bad stuff and we're given talks by a nutritionist on how to eat well.



'Depending on which year you're in you start the day with either dance or academics. As I'm in Year 10 I have academics between 8.30 and 10.30. We then have a break and then have dance until lunch. Some days I have two hours of dance and on others, four hours, when I finish at 6.30. The training is hard and it's difficult doing the same movements over and over but I enjoy trying to perfect each step and it's really satisfying when you get it right.

'I love being here and having the chance to do what I do. I'm still amazed that I'm at one of the most prestigious ballet schools in the world and that I've made it this far. In different ways I'm inspired by both Baryshnikov and Nureyev. I want to make it to the top and become principal dancer, dancing the main roles in *Swan Lake* and *Giselle*.

'Our days are different around Christmas as we get the chance to perform at Covent Garden with the Royal Ballet. Then we have to be there for the matinées by midday or by 3pm for the evening performances to give us enough time to eat something and warm up.



'A couple of years ago I played the naughty son, Fritz, in *The Nutcracker*. It was amazing being on stage and I was attached to a line wire and got to fly above everyone. It was really funny looking out at the audience and seeing the tops of all their heads!

'When we've finished classes for the day it's time for tea and at 7.15 there's prep. It can be difficult to do both school work and dance and the hardest part is trying to fit in all the homework. Sometimes there's no time to finish it, but the teachers are very understanding.

'It's great when I get to go home to Liverpool and see my family and friends. Everyone there is really supportive and my friends have always been really good about what I do – even the hard ones! Even so, I feel there are two different me's – the one in Richmond who dances and the one at home who can go off cycling or go out on the town. Sometimes it's difficult when I can't do fun stuff like skateboarding in case I get injured, but it would be worse if I couldn't dance.

'At the end of the day we get to play football or tennis in our free time or just relax and at the weekends we can go into Sheen. We're not allowed to leave the school in the evenings. Sometimes I think about what other teenagers might be doing but it doesn't really bother me as I need plenty of sleep and I prefer to do what I'm doing. I just love to dance.'



The Royal Ballet School

The school was founded in 1926 by Dame Ninette de Valois and past students include Dame Margot Fonteyn, Sir Kenneth MacMillan, Dame Antoinette Sibley, Sir Anthony Dowell, Wayne Sleep, Darcey Bussell OBE and Jonathan Cope CBE. Pupils are accepted on ability alone and 96% receive government funding towards their tuition and living expenses.

Students don't automatically make the grade into the Royal Ballet itself but many do. This year 16 out of their 19 artists, 14 out of their 18 Soloists and 8 of their 19 Principals are RBS graduates.

The school is undergoing an extensive redevelopment programme to increase the dance studio space and upgrade the academic and boarding facilities which depends on the help of donations. For more details about the school or to donate, visit: www.royal-ballet-school.org.uk or call: 020 8392 8440.