

A media item for Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance 2019:

## **CELEBRITY ICE DANCERS BRING SHOWBIZ SPARKLE TO NORTH EAST FESTIVAL**

Three of Europe's hottest ice dancers plan to light up this year's Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance (BIFF 2019) when it opens its doors in August.

The three dancers who stunned TV audiences with their flare, flamboyance and mesmerising skills on ITV's *Dancing on Ice* have a combined following of 178k followers on Instagram and 40.6k followers on Twitter. They promise to bring glitz and glamour to the Tees Valley cultural showcase.

The famous skaters are **MARK HANRETTY** (who partnered with presenter Donna Air, Loose Women's Nadia Sawalha and fitness diva Rosemary Conley), **VANESSA BAUER** (former *Dancing on Ice* champion, who partnered with X Factor star Jake Quickenden and Wes Nelson of *Love Island*) and Russia's **NINA ULANOV** (another former *Dancing on Ice* champion, who partnered with *Emmerdale*'s Matthew Wolfenden and *Corrie*'s Steven Arnold aka butcher Ashley Peacock).

This summer they will be bringing their unique style of extravagant ice dancing to the centre piece performance of the 55<sup>th</sup> Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance.

The showcase event is "*The Creative Spirit of John Curry*" – a special tribute to the sensational Olympic, World and European figure skating champion. Who took the world by storm in the 1970s but whose life was tragically cut short at the young age of 44 from an AIDS related illness. The celebration is choreographed by Mark Hanretty, Balbir Singh Company and Yebin Mok (American figure skater) – who also appears in the showcase.

The showcase event has enjoyed endorsement from a host of famous names including Jayne Torvill & Christopher Dean, and Robin Cousins.

The Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance is being supported by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and Arts Council England through its National Lottery Project grant.

Alongside the showcase there will be dancers flocking to Billingham from countries all over the globe including Brazil, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Georgia, India, Slovakia, South Korea and UK.

Other festival highlights include 'Scenes of Childhood' [family concert], 'Love and Spice' [dance, music and food by Balbir Singh Company], '1001 Dreams', 'Irish & Indian Dreams' and 'Don Quixote' (a flash mob curated by Eliot Smith Dance). The various shows will take place in venues across Billingham (Festival Arena / Billingham Forum Ice Arena / Bandstand / Seven Bingo Hall), Middlesbrough (Middlesbrough Town Hall Crypt) and Stockton (ARC Stockton Arts Centre).

Also keeping a local North East connection, both spectacular opening and closing ceremonies are being choreographed by Robby Graham of Newcastle-based Southpaw Dance Company.

“This promises to be the festival of all festivals,” says Olga Maloney, artistic director of Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance.

She adds: “Never before have we tried to be so ambitious and seek to thrill audiences with such a dazzling programme. There will be something for everyone’s tastes from traditional to contemporary and ice dancing to a global gathering of international styles. We aim to educate, enlighten and entertain.

“Our theme this year is Follow your Dreams, and we will be encouraging everyone associated with world dance to join us to make this come true. The graceful John Curry did just that and followed his dreams, and he will be forever remembered for his achievements, so much so, we are dedicating this year’s festival to his talents.”

Jane Tarr, Director, North, Arts Council England, said: “I am delighted that the Arts Council is supporting the Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance for another year. This is a great event which provides the opportunity for international artists from around the world to bring their incredible talents, skills and creativity to audiences across Stockton-on-Tees.

“It’s also brilliant to see organisations supported by the Arts Council getting involved with the festivities including Balbir Singh Dance Company, Eliot Smith Dance and Southpaw. It’s a wonderful way to commemorate the Olympian and dancer John Curry and I’m sure the legacy and celebration of his creative spirit will inspire future generations to come.”

The Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance runs from 10<sup>th</sup> until 18<sup>th</sup> of August 2019.

For all ticket information including prices, times, locations, workshop details please visit [www.billinghamfestival.co.uk](http://www.billinghamfestival.co.uk) The website also contains a box office facility where people can book their festival tickets online. Alternatively, people can call the Festival office on (01642) 553 220.

*“The Creative Spirit of John Curry”* will enjoy its world premiere performances at Billingham Forum

Ice Arena on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> August before heading over to Sheffield on 20<sup>th</sup> August to be staged at iceSheffield.

People can follow BIFF 2019 on Twitter (@BillFest) and Facebook.

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**Support Photographs: X**

**Media Contact:** (for all media enquiries including interview, preview and review requests)

Strictly Press  
0789 9910823  
[strictlypress@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:strictlypress@yahoo.co.uk)