

Zachary Faruque

FIRST ARTIST, THE ROYAL BALLET

interviewed by David Bain

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Zachary Faruque started dancing when he was nine or ten because of his mother. She was a teacher and had a weekend school in Milton Keynes to which his sister used to go. She had lots of medals from festivals and, being a boy, he thought he'd like some of those too. So he joined up. But he really is a product of the Royal Ballet School. The chance to get any of those medals was lost as he was only with his mother for a year before he moved on to the School – he commented that because he started so late he hadn't had a chance to pick up bad habits before going there! His mother and he had both wanted him to start younger but his father didn't think it a good idea for his son, preferring to see him in the rugby and football teams in which he played. So it was not until his parents divorced and his father left the country that Zachary was able to dance. So the first time his father saw Zachary dance was this season, as Bluebird. He thinks his father was probably proud of him in a way but doesn't show it and still believes it isn't a proper career for him.

As it had all happened so quickly, when he joined, Zachary found it quite overwhelming. He had no idea about the Royal Ballet School, was naïve about ballet, but his mother had sent him to the audition and told him that if he didn't get in that would be the end of his dancing. "But I was lucky enough to get in and able to carry on my career." His mother had herself always wanted to be a ballerina. She had got into the School but had fallen ill with rheumatic chorea and was out for a year and they wouldn't take her after that. She saw it as the best institution to go to if you were looking for a career in dance and had told him that if wasn't going to be the best it would be back to rugby and football.

When he joined he had found White Lodge all a bit intimidating, it being a boarding school and in the middle of a park. "Looking back now I'm nutty about it but at the time you feel you are stuck there, you don't appreciate your surroundings," he said. "It was a shock to the system to lose sport which I enjoyed and it is hard graft at such a young age." It is a tough regime,

the dedication required doing academics as well as ballet dancing, is immense "but it needs that." He enjoyed his time, wouldn't change it for the world. He had his ups and downs and he left the school a couple of times. Once was at the end of White Lodge. He had just done GCSEs, they were doing the shows in Holland Park and he decided he had had enough as a 16 year-old boy does. So at midnight he had hopped over the fence, ran straight through the park, headed for Richmond station and got on a train home. "They all woke up next day and I was gone!" He didn't go back to White Lodge for the last month or so, but he did turn up for first year Upper School in September. Then, after three months he walked in to Gailene Stock's office and told her he had

“at midnight he had hopped over the fence, ran straight through the park, headed for Richmond station and got on a train home. “They all woke up next day and I was gone!”

had enough. Gailene had said fine, his place was always open, go and do what you need to do. Zach thinks she knew he was always going to come back; she knew him quite well by then – and he had done it once before. He went to the local school in Sharnbrook for three months doing his A levels "then suddenly I realised where my life was. Sometimes, to find out you want to do, especially something like ballet, you need to have it taken away from. Then you find out what is important to you."

Zachary was in the same year at White Lodge as Lauren Cuthbertson, Paul Kay, Jonathan Watkins and Natalie Harrison. He was taught by Christine Beckham in the first year. In the second year it was a bit strange as Gailene Stock was coming in, succeeding Merle Park, and teachers got switched around. So Anthony Saul, who is now at Elmhurst, taught Zachary all through from second year to fifth year "which helped us as he knew us very well, our strengths and weaknesses." In fifth year

he had Anatoli Grigoriev “who was the most amazing teacher, I loved to work with him, but very sadly he is not with us any more, a shame for the School.”

He had danced David Bintley’s *En Bateau pas de deux*; *Peter and the Wolf* was a great ballet by Matthew Hart which was really fun. Then he did *Golden Vanity* which Matthew Hart choreographed while he was there which he hadn’t enjoyed so much. He danced his leaving pas de deux in *Les Patineurs*.

Zachary described the change between being at White Lodge where “you are wrapped in cotton wool” and then “you find yourself living in your own flat, aged 17, the freedom, completely independent.” So it is quite nice to have an influx of others at that stage, who have not been in the RBS, not so looked after, and it works well. Sometimes the incomers are very, very good but sometimes there are those whose basic technique isn’t

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so good as they haven’t had five years at White Lodge and that can slow things down. But rarely. Ludovico Ondiviela joined in second year of Upper School, Olivia Cowley in first year. In Upper School, Zachary was taught by Chris Powney, a teacher who will always stick in his head. He feels that the teaching is excellent and that Gailene has done a good job.

Zachary believes it is no bad thing to have foreign dancers in the Company as “you need to keep the competition.” British dancers should be kept near to heart and helped “but once in the Company it is a professional job so should be based on talent.” It is a shame when there aren’t talented British dancers but there are Lauren and Rupert now. There were those that came in with Zachary and others coming through like Xander Parrish and Liam Scarlett, who is a good choreographer. However, “it is up to dancers to push ourselves. I don’t want to be given roles just because I’m British.” He commented that British dancers have an innate awe for the Company in the first two years because of having been at the School which foreign dancers don’t and this possibly holds them back a bit.

In the second year at school he described how “you work with the Company and get to experience a professional company. In the third year you work with the Company and tour.” In his second year the Company did *Onegin*, (Zachary was “one of the four guys who stand at the back”), *Romeo and Juliet*, *Nutcracker* and *Firebird*. “It involved a bit of dancing.” The School toured to Jersey,

Swansea and New York but Zachary couldn’t go to the latter as he had dislocated his knee.

In his final year, he did *Concertantes* pdd which he would like to do again now, *Sleeping Beauty pas de trois*, and *Mendelssohn Concerto* by Austrian choreographer Mark Annear. He knew he was coming to the Company from March/April. Because of his knee he had got stuck, but then he was lucky as he got back dancing quickly and Monica Mason had watched class and offered Zachary a job. He didn’t audition anywhere else.

Life in the Company is different for a boy than for a girl. There are lots of girls “as ballet is a feminine art form.” The corps does more dancing – “you don’t see a girl holding a spear.” Girls get to dance early on; it is a lot more competitive “but possibly once you get the chance you may go further.” For boys there are two paths. The main way is the prince way. “Or if you are shorter you do first soloist roles, jester, Alain, Franz in *Coppélia*.” Zachary is always worried that he will do the latter which he doesn’t really want. The other way is harder, generally supporting the ballerina. “You do solos and tricks but the ballerina is the prima ballerina, your job is looking after her which is a lot of pressure.” Zachary would like to move in the princely direction.

How do you prepare for pas de deux work? Zachary pointed out that pas de deux is such big part of ballet, starting at School with supported adage. “In the Upper School you do the repertoire and then you join the Company and don’t do any more pas de deux. You get no practice then suddenly you get offered Bluebird – to dance with a girl. It’s a shame there are no pas de deux classes as you do lose it. For a girl, she does the classical steps but for a boy it is all about supporting balances, etc, a very different way of thinking. In class you think about yourself. For a boy in pas de deux you have to think about both so it is harder for the guys.”

Nephew in *Nutcracker* was the first role with a pdd that Zachary got and he really liked it. He did it with Gemma Bond last season and this season with Gemma and then Caroline Duprot. Bluebird is different, straight into a pdd, there is no character. “But wham, bang you appear, do it, then you are off. It is a lot harder than Nephew, in a different league, Bluebird is technically challenging.”

The new production of *Beauty* had nine casts – for 11 shows. Only four casts went on. Zach was one of the lucky ones – he said he can thank Alexander Agadzhanov who helped him. “Some coaches teach but don’t give. Alexander Agadzhanov will give everything he knows. Some withhold as they don’t want you to be better than they were. It was a real pleasure.”

Zachary was very surprised to get Bluebird, as it is early in his career. But he is very glad. He partnered Yuhui Choe. One of the worst things is to share a partner. It is much easier to work with someone who is working with just one person, you have time to make it

work between you, it's a partnership.

Partnering skills develop with practice. You remember steps and there are some tricks. "At the first rehearsal you are all over place but then it comes." Zachary did *Concerto* with Hikaru Kobayashi in Bermuda and Florida after the season ended. *Concerto* is very hard for the guy, and they had to rehearse in their own time. But after a week in rehearsal the strength was there, everything came back. Muscle memory plays a part. "Once you are on stage you have to perform and act and there is so much to think about that technique and the choreography has to be there. So muscle memory is the best way of doing it."

In second year he did *Les Noces*. He was down to do one of the two soloist boys but the two lead boys went off, then Ben had to learn it and do it for one show, and then he also went off and Christopher Saunders put Zachary on. It was his first big break. It was good fun – although he made one or two mistakes!

“Choose the hardest part and work on that, do it over and over again. You get a dry mouth and your teeth get dry – lips get stuck, which makes it hard to smile while simultaneously breathing and looking after the girl!

He has covered a lot of cavaliers in *Cinderella*. "It is nice, as you begin to learn a bit more and get to do rehearsals and do the odd double tour." Covering is very hard as you go into rehearsal but "you have to be at the back and try to learn something that is being put onto someone else. You pick up snippets. You are longing to have a go." Suddenly if the opportunity arises "you think you know it, but you are used to doing it with someone in front of you. When you have to do it you go all over the place."

Zachary had been two years in the Company and doing lots of covering then in his third season he was in *Les Rendezvous pas de trois* which was good fun. "I wouldn't have cast me in it but I really enjoyed doing it, once I started to work on it, it was good for my stamina, it gave me a lot." Then he debuted in *Nutcracker*. Third season was much nicer, things started to happen.

In his fourth year he got injured which for him is very rare, only once since he joined the company. He tore a ligament in his ankle and it was just a matter of waiting for it to heal. He was cast for *Rake's Progress*, Dancing Master, a really nice role, also *Homage to the Queen*, Steven McRae's second cast, and he lost Bluebird on tour. So he lost a lot of nice things. He was rehearsing *Fire* in *Homage*. *Fire* is a very hard piece and initially he was only down to cover Steven but Chris Wheeldon wanted Zachary to do it. So Steven had to do all the per-

formances. *Fire* was made on Steven who has a unique body, amazing for ballet, so it was awkward for Zachary, but everyone has their own way of doing things. "It is surprising – look at *Children of Adam*, created on Steven as first cast then Ludovico did it completely differently although it is the same character, same ballet, same choreographer. People bring different things to the same role and that is what is amazing about ballet."

Zachary has been fortunate to be involved in a lot of new work – *DGV* with Christopher Wheeldon, *Children of Adam* with Alastair Marriott, which took a long time. It is nice to work with a new choreographer, you get more out of rehearsals and it helps because things are being created on you so they can be changed, not like with choreography that has been around for a long time. Every choreographer is different. Vanessa Fenton knows exactly what she wants, like Liam Scarlett. Alastair Marriott is different. He has a rough idea but a lot comes from the dancer. Sometimes it is about an idea rather than the actual steps themselves. Zachary doesn't want to choreograph, not yet anyway. He has never felt it was a strength.

Zachary was asked about stamina and how he maintains it. When rehearsals start "at first you think you will die." Running is good for stamina but Zachary smokes "which is not good." It's up to you to build it. There's lots of equipment, running machines, etc "but best is doing the piece over and over, run it and run it. Choose the hardest part and work on that, do it over and over again. You get a dry mouth and your teeth get dry – lips get stuck, which makes it hard to smile while simultaneously breathing and looking after the girl!"

In Macmillan ballets you have to be a character – you have to act and dance – which is very good fun. It is one of the beauties of Macmillan whom Zachary adores – more than Balanchine, although he loves *Theme and Variations*. "In Macmillan you chop and change, brothels, peasants – and you can be any kind peasant you want." In May, Zachary is Lead Officer in *Mayerling* which is a really nice role, he is looking forward to it. "What I love about Macmillan is that he has such passion in his ballets and so when done well it works, it is the ultimate." It is really good fun. The guys in the company love to do the officers.

Zachary is doing the pas de trois in *Swan Lake*. Then the Company goes on tour to Mexico, San Antonio, Philadelphia "It is a major perk of the job. You have a lot of fun, go out a lot together. I don't do it often at home. It's nice, the camaraderie, everyone has fun." Past tours include Orange County and New York, and Japan, Korea and Singapore. Then last year Spain, Turkey and Washington. He participated in a gala last year in Italy. This year he has been invited to Florida by the arranger, in his own time. It gives dancers the opportunity to do things they like to do.

Next season will be *Bayadère*. Rumour has it that

Voluntaries will be re-done as a memorial as Glen Tetley recently died. Then *Beatrix Potter* and *Patineurs*. There are nice roles in *Bayadère* – Bronze Idol although Zach is “not sure about body paint,” and he’s cover for Solor. He has covered principal roles like Colas. “Until you get the opportunities to do it you don’t know you can. You need them to prove what you can do. It’s different doing it in class to doing it on stage with 2,500 people watching.”

Zachary likes Bournonville. He really enjoyed *Napoli* with Johan Kobborg. He described Bournonville as very technical, “from the waist down, all legs and feet like Irish dancing. It’s a different way of working.” They had Jonny Eliasson taking class which was great. Zachary was surprised how much he enjoyed it. “It is not my favourite but I do enjoy it, it’s good for stamina.”

Zachary was asked about academics and whether he was good at them so he could do something other than dancing if he wanted to. He always enjoyed academic work and he had a good start at a private school. There are ways to keep your brain going. He really enjoys learning.

What he does to relax depends on his energy levels. He enjoys being physical “but not doing what is primarily your work”. He recently got into indoor climbing which he finds therapeutic. He is teaching himself guitar and likes to read.

Zachary has done *Bluebird* with Yuhui and *Theme and Variations* with her. Has management got eyes on you as pair? Zachary loves working together “but whether we both do same thing I can’t tell. Don’t think Monica is that keen on it at the moment. I’d love to do *Rhapsody* with her. It’s hard not to get type cast but how much or how little they give us I don’t know. Here’s hoping.”

Did any one dancer influence you more than any other? Carlos – “obvious, but technically you can’t fault him, his exuberance, confidence without arrogance, you see him on stage and he is just breath-taking. You just have to hear the audience, it’s rare to hear the Opera House applaud so loudly, to watch a show when the crowd is screaming. As a performer you want people to enjoy what you do and if the crowd is screaming you have done what you want to do, which is to entertain. He plays things very masculine, never weak, and he came from nothing.”

Most embarrassing moment on stage was *not* being on stage. In his first year in *Cinderella* on tour, Zach was one of the courtiers. When the curtain goes up, a couple is supposed to come from both sides. This time, a couple came in on one side and a single girl on the other... The call had gone out but he was warming up in studio and missed the start of the act! He got severely roasted by Christopher Carr. *Cinderella* is Zachary’s bogey ballet, he has missed other entrances twice!

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