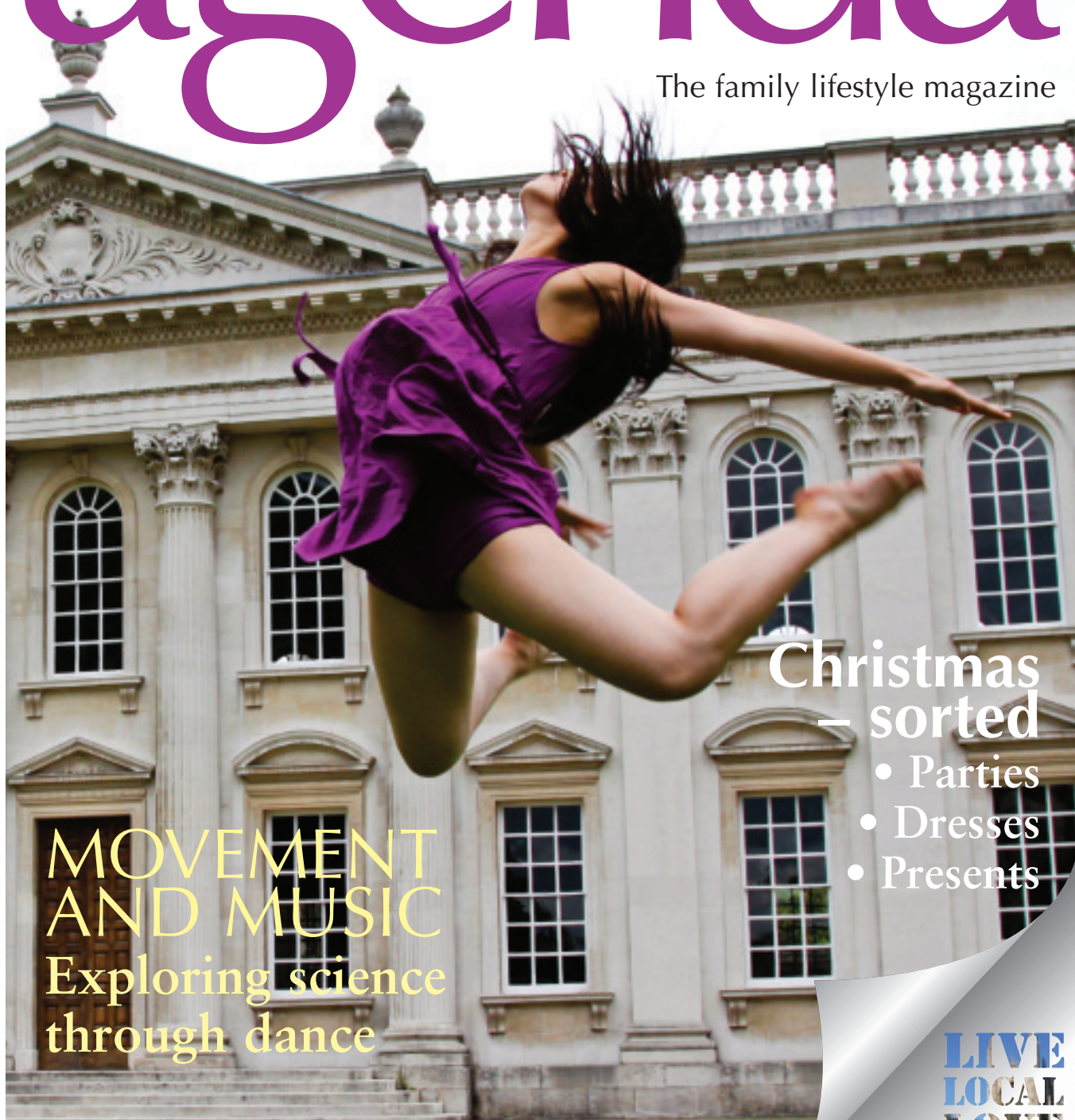


cambridgeshire

agenda

The family lifestyle magazine



**MOVEMENT
AND MUSIC**
Exploring science
through dance

**Christmas
— sorted**

- Parties
- Dresses
- Presents

WIN!

- £500 of energy-saving kitchen kit
- Lunch for two at Midsummer House
- Tickets to the Cambridge Wine Show

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Light, music, action

Art, science and dance are brought together in a unique collaboration to celebrate the end of Cambridge University's 800th year. **Olivia Abbott** meets the people behind the event

It's a very rare thing for Senate House to open its doors to the public and even rarer for it to host a performance of any kind – other than graduation ceremonies. But next month the space will be transformed into an art gallery, a dance theatre and a scientific experiment all in one.

With themes of time and transition, the performance of 'Light Matter' will use dance, art and music to 'explore the path from experiment to discovery and the eternal quest for knowledge'. The event is a collaboration between professional artists and students, bringing together a range of disciplines to celebrate the breadth and depth of Cambridge University tradition.

'We wanted it to be huge'

'We were wondering what to do to celebrate the 800th anniversary,' says Jennifer Hersch, co-founder and artistic director of Cambridge Contemporary Dance. 'We wanted to do something involving some type of collaboration, and we wanted it to be huge. Throughout the year there have been choral performances, science events and lecture series, but we wanted to bring everything together and celebrate what's great about Cambridge and the intellectual tradition from an artistic point of view.'

Christ's College artist-in-residence Issam Kourbaj was brought on board, and the still-ongoing creation process began. 'I'd been working with light and objects for a few years,' says Issam, 'plus I'm in the process of finalising a set with a theatre company who are doing a play about Newton, so I could see the potential of using light as a form of collaboration with dancers. When we met there were many ideas on the table and suddenly light brought everything together.'

One of the main factors that had to be considered and that has a huge influence on the project is the venue – when Senate House was chosen, it was up to the artists, choreographers and composers to work out how they would fill this historic space. There is no stage as such and the pieces – in

design, choreography and composition – are all being created to fit the space.

Says Jennifer, 'The audience will walk into Senate House and it will be like an art gallery, a space where the performing arts meets the visual arts. So it'll be like going to the Tate, but when the audience comes in, the performance will begin.'

Anything could happen

At the time of writing, *Light Matter* is still very much a work in progress, with composers, choreographers and artists all taking part in brainstorming workshops to push the creative process.

'Visually and choreographically, how you could use the space becomes part of the performance,' says Issam, who talks of light installations, prisms and rainbows and something called the analemma effect, which is a figure-of-eight path made by the sun in the sky over the course of a year. He shows me an idea for dancers using different coloured fabrics to represent layers of light.

'The great thing about this project is that there is no script,' he says. 'It's a blank canvas, so the starting point is visual, and everybody having a reaction to the visual. It's a fascinating process. My work influences the choreography and space and vice versa.'

When I ask what the audience can actually expect to see when they arrive at Senate House for the performance, Jennifer says, 'There will be seven dance pieces, three new musical compositions, and seven new visual designs for each of them. Pieces will explore the idea of the prism reflection and the



Historic Senate House with its distinctive chequered floor and high ceiling is a challenging and exciting venue for a gala performance of dance and art to round off the University's 800th year

colour spectrum; there'll be a piece exploring Tennyson's *Ode to Memory* with sculptor Anna Gillespie, and a piece about reflection of light. The final piece explores the analemma effect.

A delight for the senses

'It's going to be a bit of an Escher painting where everything is unexpected, and your senses are always being delighted in some way. There will be choral music, contemporary dance, classical compositions, contemporary compositions and there'll even be a theremin player – a musical instrument that is played without touch, simply by movement of the hands over it, using electromagnetic force to make sounds.'

But both she and Issam are keen to stress that they want the audience to find their

own meaning in the work.

'Light, time, transitions: this is the theme running through the whole evening,' says Issam, 'but if somebody is interested in something else, that's great. We'd like people to take something we didn't expect or intend, to be active rather than passive.'

'I want to move people,' says Jennifer. 'Even if it's just one person who goes away moved in some way, I've always felt most complimented when someone says "That piece made me cry". We want people to have that 'ah' moment.'

● *Light Matter*, Senate House; Friday, 4 December 7.30pm and Saturday, 5 December 6pm, tickets £16/£12 concessions, adcticketing.com or 01223 300085. Visit cambridgecontemporarydance.co.uk.



Photography by Claude Schneider