

# Singing

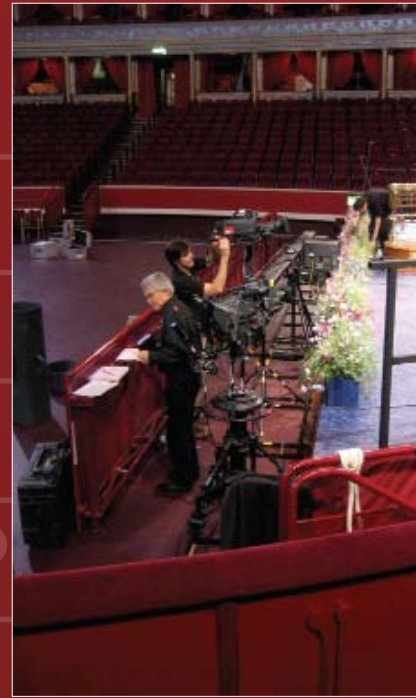
from the same song sheet



SISLIVE camera supervisor Vince Spooner explains how classical multi-camerawork is the order of the day on The Proms



▲ Keith Dawson operating on stage



▲ Dan Scala and Dave Brice rig on the last night



▲ Close-up camera - Mike Graham

“success in televising the concerts is a result of one thing above all else – teamwork”

For the first 50 years in television's history, multi-camera camerawork was more or less the only practical way of making electronically sourced programmes. Happily, it is still to be found alive and well, both inside and outside studios, involved in everything from concerts to comedy.

Once a year, the Royal Albert Hall plays host to a series of OBs, the demands of which make for some particularly satisfying days at the office for its team of multi-camera operators. For seven weeks, one of the world's great music festivals, the BBC Proms, goes about its business, culminating in September with the famous Last Night.

### TV plays second fiddle

The first thing to appreciate about The Proms is that this is not an event run by television; we are, for historical reasons, the guests of radio. The BBC first undertook responsibility for these

concerts in 1927 and naturally they were initially broadcast on radio. To this day it is BBC Radio that plans them and only in recent years has television committed to covering more than the half dozen or so formerly broadcast each year.

The second thing to realise is that both TV and radio are themselves guests of the Royal Albert Hall. Health and Safety protocols have to be adhered to and these can have a direct influence on the look of shots. For example, viewers of a certain age may recall presenter Richard Baker perched on the front edge of a first level box with an unobstructed view of the audience behind. This is now impossible without a barrier rail that, even at the minimum height, at best looks like, well... a barrier.

Also, since tickets are not free, sightlines for the paying audience are a significant consideration when positioning cameras and the inevitable

compromises involved can lead to less than perfect angles.

We by no means have free rein to go anywhere we like and the camera positions tend to comprise a blend of the following:

- There may be one or two rostrum-mounted cameras half-way back on the Arena Floor among the standing Prommers, plus two more rostra positioned against the Arena wall – one at 3 o'clock and the other at 9 o'clock.
- In 'No-Man's Land', just in front of the stage, we usually have either one or two Ospreys on standard track, separated from the Prommers by a barrier.
- On stage there are plenty of options for cameras mounted on Osprey pedestals.
- An organ-loft position gives reverse shots into the Hall as well as shots of the keyboard.

- There is a jib position camera-right at audience entrance level.
- Other options include around the Hall in the boxes, both at Loggia level and the Grand Tier, plus high up in the 'Gods'.
- Finally we can pre-record interviews using cabled cameras backstage and have interval positions in the same areas.

The choice of which positions are used for any given concert is driven by a number of factors.

Production requirements for concerts transmitted on BBC4 differ from those of the two main BBC channels in terms of numbers of cameras, use of cranes, the in-vision 'look' for presentation and whether the broadcast will be in high or standard definition.

Orchestral layout is a prime consideration, particularly the positioning of instrumental and vocal soloists. Since individual directors

have their own preferences for camera placement, they tend to script each concert differently and so it is very unusual for consecutive concerts to use exactly the same camera positions.

Another factor is the input of orchestral managements. Orchestras have their own 'personalities' and in my experience all but a very few welcome cameras into their midst. There is no doubting the value of having cameras on stage as these give a perspective that auditorium cameras simply cannot match. They also have enough flexibility to be able to offer subtle moves and to compensate for an errantly placed musician.

Limited platform space with very large orchestras does sometimes force us to use a remote-controlled camera. I never really like going down this route as invariably a musician will unwittingly move his or her chair and destroy the shot, which we are then powerless to correct. It also adds to precious rigging time in already tight schedules.

### Working in harmony

Wherever the cameras end up, another crucial factor in determining the success of shots is microphone placement. Given the nature of these events, sound quality will always have the highest priority and, in the past, few concessions were made to television. Even now there still tends to be a forest of slings stretched across the stage, plus a handful of rogue microphone stands resembling scaffold poles and a collection of instrumental mics for which good looks were clearly not a prime design consideration. Inevitably, these can compromise framing and this can be very frustrating because most of the close-up cameras cannot move to compensate. However, in recent years, microphone issues have been noticeably less problematic due in large part to the mutual respect that has grown up between the camera and sound departments. This is a good illustration that success in televising the concerts is a result of one thing above all else – teamwork.

This is probably no great revelation but nevertheless its importance cannot be overstated. It starts with the relationship of resources provider SISLIVE with BBC Classical Music Television. This department puts in a huge amount of effort and Production Manager Charlotte Gazzard commands enormous respect for her professionalism and refreshing sense

of fun that she somehow manages to maintain throughout an extremely busy schedule.

The production team sets high standards and is always quick to praise anyone who has performed well. My working relationship with Engineering Manager Jeremy Turner, Rigger Supervisor John Collins and Sound Supervisor Andy Payne helps iron out any potential problems at the planning stage, and by the time we all arrive for the First Night there should hopefully be few surprises to worry the Event Management at the Hall.

### Key to a good concert

Planning starts in earnest in the early months of the New Year. In 2009, the televised concerts fell broadly into four-day blocks. Although, in theory, it would be possible to have the same team working on more or less every concert, the very long days and intense concentration take their toll, and so to keep crews fresh and give opportunities to as many people as possible, I tend to mix and match.

There is a talented pool of predominately SISLIVE camera operators and freelance colleagues from whom to choose. Worthy of particular note are the considerable talents of Dave Brice on the Jimmy Jib, Dan Scala and Giles Pritchard in 'No Man's Land' and Liz Hillman on stage.

No camera crew on a classical music event could function without the script supervisor whose shot-counts form the bedrock of the transmission, or the vision-mixer whose skills contribute so much to putting together a 'clean' show. The mutual reliance of camera operators and mixers upon each other is one of the most rewarding aspects of multi-camera work.

### In tune with each other

Multi-camera skills are often talked about in general terms and the full gamut of these is called upon for The Proms.

Absolutely key to success is the ability to see each other's shots in the context of both the live cut and the director's scripted version and, if necessary, to modify one's framing in order to maintain a consistent style. An instinctive reliance on the rest of the crew is essential since often the concerts, particularly in 2009, offer woefully little rehearsal time. On occasions we have gone on air virtually sight-reading the shot cards.

In what are popularly known as the 'good old days', in my case the late 1970s, camera crews formed very close professional and personal bonds by virtue of consisting of the same five or six people who would come to think almost as one. This meant that shot sizes, looking-room and basic framing were consistent. Often directors, sometimes without even really being aware of it, would get the best results from allowing the quiet interaction of the crew to flow rather than sticking slavishly to the shot cards. Nowadays I suspect the most successful multi-camera shows are those where individual camera operators work regularly together and where mutual trust and respect rather than egos are the order of the day.

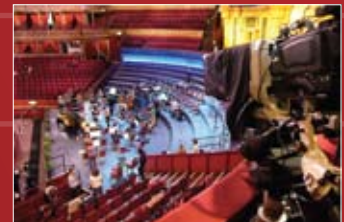
### A feel for the music

The Proms requires two important abilities – one learnable and the other, I believe, not so.

First, becoming familiar with the basic layout of an orchestra is very straightforward. Individual instruments can prove a little trickier, especially in the percussion section, so beloved of modern composers. But basically it is not difficult. This is not to say that mistakes aren't made as



▲ SISLIVE trucks at RAH



▲ View from the Grand Tier



▲ In vision camera position

### Reading the score

The ability to interpret what is written on the shot card is another key requirement. Again this may sound pretty basic but when presented with

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there is the ever-present minefield of identifying the 'bumper' horn players and rogue brass players. It is always a test of nerve when, as the shot looms ever nearer, the expected player steadfastly refuses to pick up their instrument. It would be fair to say that many a quick-witted vision-mixer has helped keep the bum-shot count to a minimum.

A second, more fundamental and instinctive, ability is being able to sense the mood of a piece of music. Anyone who cannot 'feel' the pace of a zoom or move, and for whom bar-counts relate only to beer intake, will find themselves severely out of their comfort zone. This is often discussed over a pint but it seems to me a fact of life that some people have this gift and others just don't.

a shot description like 'Single cello' or 'Violin 1' or 'Best woodwind', what do you do? Does it mean instrument or player? What shot size? Looking left or right? And how does the shot cut from the preceding shot and to the succeeding shot? These are decisions that are made all the time on The Proms and which are not always clearly defined by some directors. One of the most important tools to help camera operators in making these decisions is – and for those not used to working in a multi-camera environment I cannot over-emphasise how crucial this is – the viewfinder return button. This is probably the single most essential operational control after zoom and focus because it enables the operator to see, in an instant, the live cut and to place his or her shots in the context



▲ Giles Pritchard in 'No-man's Land'

of that cut. This seems an almost patronisingly obvious thing to say, but it is something so often ignored by inexperienced operators or those from a single-camera background that I think it is worth repeating. A

quick glance at the viewfinder return instantly provides confirmation of how your contribution fits and whether you need to take any action to improve it. Having your wits about you is crucial and this humble little button enables you to act upon them.

### Playing by ear

A typical Prom day starts early and finishes late – so no surprise there. The camera crew is usually in by 9am and immediately gets stuck into re-rigging cameras from the previous evening's performance. It can be quite tight getting ready in time for rehearsal, and final camera positions – particularly those on stage – are seldom quite as expected. Orchestra rehearsals take place away from the Hall prior to concert days and form the basis of the camera scripts. However, not infrequently a conductor will move substantial parts of the orchestra almost at whim, destroying in an instant the director's hard work and then, more than likely, will only rehearse bits and pieces. On these occasions it feels like going into

battle, but as ever teamwork triumphs – though sometimes not without some entertaining talkback!

Immediately after music rehearsals there is a presenter rehearsal and sometimes a pre-recorded interview with a conductor or soloist. Camera notes follow after lunch and a lot of hard work is done at this stage in correcting shots that didn't work or would perhaps work better elsewhere. This can mean that a good percentage of the evening's transmission consists of shots being seen for the first time. Once again, that viewfinder return button comes into its own.

Sometimes there is simply not enough time to go through the whole show and on these occasions we go on air with an extra frisson. This is particularly so with a heavily scripted concert: one example this season featured more than 80 pages of shot cards, the weight of which meant the cameras had to be rebalanced! The concerts usually finish around 10pm or 10.30pm and we then re-rig what we can for the next day.

Every Prom can be very different and much comment has been made about the 2009 non-classical Prom inspired by the music of MGM musicals. This was a good example of all the team skills coming together.

Rehearsal for the concert started at 3pm and this was the first time any of the camera crew had seen it. With little time for camera notes after the rehearsal as the transmission time was early and a presenter rehearsal and truncated dinner had to be fitted in, it was a combination of Ian Russell's calm direction, some assured vision-mixing and an experienced crew that made the transmission a success.

Inevitably there were a few moments when we wished we had enjoyed a bit more rehearsal time, but I wonder how many of us have thought that over the years? Viewers and GTC members on the Forum reacted very positively to this particular Prom, the latter all the more gratifying as cameramen can be an unforgiving lot!

To anyone unfamiliar with multi-camera work, I can only say that despite having done my fair share of single camera over the years, which of course has its own satisfaction, I still enjoy the camaraderie and sociability of working with a team of talented people at the highest level. I hope that it remains as relevant in the future as it did in the first 50 years of television.

With thanks to SISLIVE for all photographs

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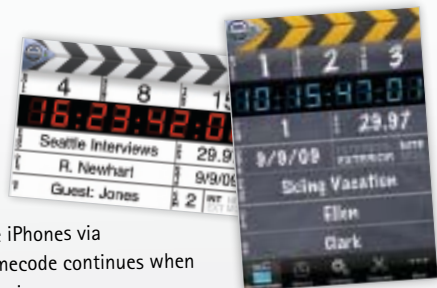


## There's an App for that

Movie★Slate – £5.99  
Seller: PureBlend Software

Movie★Slate is a digital slate, clapperboard, shot log and shot notepad. This is an easy way to log footage and take notes as you shoot. Begin a project by tapping an individual field on the slate to edit production info. Choose directors and DoPs from your contacts or saved history, or use the keyboard to enter new info. An optimised keypad enables you to quickly enter roll, scene and take info. Switch between multiple productions by loading info from the history.

Setting timecode is simple and fast using a specialised keypad. You can sync timecode between multiple iPhones via Bluetooth and timecode continues when the app is not running.



When you're ready to begin your shot, photograph the production info, and tap the clapper sticks. The clapper opens and closes, creating an audio/visual marker. The optional credits 'leader roll' briefly displays an image of each production info component.

## Crew 2009

### Cameras

- Rob Barker
- David Brice
- Wai King Cheung
- Steve Coleman
- Keith Dawson
- James Day
- Mark Faulkner
- Adam Gohil
- Chris Goor
- Mike Graham
- Lawrence Hall
- Richard Hayward
- Liz Hillman
- Paul Holman
- Christy Lee
- Terry Loader
- Mike MacDonald
- Chris Martin
- Bruce Miller
- Tim Moses
- Phil Nixon
- David Oliver
- Andy Parr
- Julian Penrose
- Giles Pritchard
- Andy Robertson
- Carol Sadler
- Dan Scala
- Vince Spooner
- Geoff Thomas
- Peter Wrench

### Vision-mixers

- Alison Bartrop
- Hilary Briegel
- Denise Foley
- Priscilla Hoadley
- Martin Jessop
- Sonia Lovett
- Julie Mann
- Paul Mitchell

## Fact File



Vince joined the BBC in 1978 as a trainee camera assistant at Television Centre and is now a camera supervisor for SISLIVE. Career highlights are many but being trusted to track the legendary Ron Green; operating the tracking camera on the 100m Final at the Sydney Olympics; and heading the team that won the 2004/05 RTS Award for Multi-Camerawork on *Flashmob the Opera* were especially memorable.