

Royal Ballet performance in a wheelchair

- 1 The Royal Ballet is staging a performance in which one of its dancers performs a duet with a disabled dancer, recognising that being inclusive is “not just about diversity of race, but also about diversity of physical ability”.
- 2 Joe Powell-Main, who uses a wheelchair and crutches to perform and describes himself as a “differently abled dancer”, will appear with the Royal Ballet dancer Isabel Lubach in a lyrical piece created for the Greenwich + Docklands international festival next month. His story is about overcoming life’s obstacles to pursue a dream that he had had since he was five. Powell-Main is determined to “challenge perceptions, start conversations and open up opportunities for me and other differently abled dancers”.
- 3 Having danced from the age of four, he had won a place at the prestigious Royal Ballet School (RBS), even performing as a student in a Royal Ballet staging of *The Nutcracker*, among other productions – only to see his hopes of becoming a professional dancer hit by a condition that affected his mobility. During his fourth year of training, he had developed injuries after a period of growth, leading to surgery on his left knee. Complications developed and a serious car accident took a further toll on his body, bringing his RBS training to an end.
- 4 Aged 15, he was using a wheelchair and assumed he would never dance again. 7 after his mother spotted a leaflet about wheelchair dancing, which played a part in helping him to accept his disability. He went on to dance with Ballet Cymru, among others, and won top prizes in Latin and ballroom dancing competitions.
- 5 Powell-Main, 24, from Newtown, Powys, said: “When I acquired my disability, I completely thought dance wasn’t an option for me ... I thought that was completely over. Then I thought: why not wheelchair ballet? In terms of partnering, it’s a new way of doing things ... We bend the rules quite a lot but, because we bend the rules, I feel we’re at the cutting-edge of progressing ballet further to a brighter, inclusive future.”
- 6 The Royal Ballet first worked with him at the Wembley Arena for the Paralympic homecoming ceremony marking the success of the Paralympic GB Athletes during Tokyo 2020. He performed a piece that he created alongside the Royal Ballet dancer Kristen McNally to the song *Nobody*



Knows Me Like You Do by the singer and songwriter Birdy. He also took part in the company's platform, Draft Works, creating a new work with McNally and the Royal Ballet principal, Alexander Campbell. That work, titled *Sleepwalker*, has now been extended and he will perform it as a 10-minute duet with Lubach at the Greenwich + Docklands international festival. Lubach said that dancing with Powell-Main is "really special". "It has opened up refreshing possibilities, sharing weight between each other, using speed and dynamic in different ways and you get the really rich movement from his chair, the gliding motions ... It's like an extension of his body."

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