



**Friday 8 May, 2026**

## **P&O Cruises celebrates ten-year partnership with Wilkes Academy**

P&O Cruises is celebrating its long-standing commitment to developing home-grown stage talent as the cruise line marks ten years sponsoring the Wilkes Academy of Performing Arts.

Championing young, up-and-coming performers at the college since 2016, P&O Cruises sponsorship supports students for 12 months of training – enabling graduates to kickstart rewarding careers with the cruise line’s in-house Headliners Theatre Company.

Widely recognised for its focus on professional excellence and industry-ready training, Wilkes Academy – founded by TV Personality and performer Jonathan Wilkes – has built a strong reputation for equipping students with the skills, confidence and discipline required to succeed in competitive industries.

Jonathan Wilkes said: “We are incredibly grateful to P&O Cruises for ten wonderful years of partnership. Its unwavering support, along with the generous scholarships and opportunities it provides has been truly transformative for our students and graduates. Seeing our graduates showcase their talents across the fleet is a constant source of pride.”

The Academy’s mission centres on delivering the highest standard of education while preparing students for long-term career success, something that closely aligns with P&O Cruises own values and people-first culture.

P&O Cruises supports Wilkes Academy students from education through to graduation, opening the door to real employment opportunities across its fleet of seven ships. Graduates can take their first professional steps at sea, gaining invaluable experience while travelling the world and contributing to unforgettable holidays for thousands of guests each year.

Carnival UK & P&O Cruises president, Paul Ludlow, said: “We are incredibly proud of our ten-year partnership with the Wilkes Academy of Performing Arts. The Academy shares our passion for excellence, professionalism and ambition. Supporting these students allows us to nurture future talent who go on to build exciting careers with us, seeing the world as Headliners across our fleet.”

For more information, call P&O Cruises on 0344 338 8003, visit [www.pocruises.com](http://www.pocruises.com) or visit a travel agent.

A selection of images can be downloaded, [here](#).

**ENDS**

### **Notes to Editors**

Based in Swindon, Wiltshire, Wilkes Academy of Performing Arts provides professional training in the performing arts and offers a BA (Hons) in Musical Theatre in partnership with the University of Staffordshire.

The first two P&O Cruises scholarship students were Charlotte Marella (Charlotte Payne) who performed on board Arvia, Arcadia and Britannia and Joel Ekperigin who went on to join the cast of JLS, Thriller Live, Magic Mike Live and Magic Mike’s Last Dance.



Currently performing on board from Wilkes Academy of Performing Arts are:

Ellie Morse from Swindon on Britannia  
James Tobby from Guildford on Britannia  
Ella White from Gloucester on Arvia

P&O Cruises scholarship graduates include:

- Spencer Darlaston-Jones (Britannia)
  - Associate Choreographer HMS Pinafore and 'Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny' – English National Opera
  - 'Fred Astaire' – MJ The Musical
  - 'Romeo' - Newsies The Musical

Wilkes Academy Alumni include:

- Solomon Davy: Chad Manford – The Code, Link Larkin – Hairspray, Christian Stovitz – Clueless The Musical, Kenickie – Grease The Musical
- Jaydon Vijn: Rum Tum Tugger – CATS, Hydra – Starlight Express, Wonka 2023, WICKED
- Kalila Khan (2025): Moulin Rouge! The Musical
- Laveda Dione (2025): Swing – Harry Potter & The Cursed Child
- Lydia Rodford: Capital Radio Presenter

**For further press information please contact:**

Michele Andjel, [michele.andjel@carnivalukgroup.com](mailto:michele.andjel@carnivalukgroup.com) 07730 732 072

Sam Balls, [sam.balls@pocruises.com](mailto:sam.balls@pocruises.com) 07879 198864

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### **About P&O Cruises**

P&O Cruises is Britain's favourite cruise line, welcoming guests onboard its seven ships to experience holidays with a blend of discovery, choice, relaxation and exceptional service catered towards British tastes. With a proud history spanning more than 187 years, each ship has its own appeal from family friendly or exclusively for adults with every sailing delivering each guest a *holiday like never before*.

With over 230 destinations worldwide, P&O Cruises itineraries are carefully curated to inspire discovery and are varied to suit newcomers and experienced guests alike. P&O Cruises prides itself on working with top culinary talent; Food Heroes include chefs Marco Pierre White and José Pizarro as well as award-winning drinks expert Olly Smith.

Recent awards for P&O Cruises include:

1. Wave Awards 2025 – Best Advertising & Marketing Campaign
2. British Travel Awards 2025 – Best Cruise Line for Family Holidays
3. The Travel Industry Awards 2025 by TTG – Industry Marketing Campaign of the Year
4. Sailwaze Excellence Awards 2025 – Best in Entertainment
5. Best in Cruise Awards by Cruise Critic Awards 2025 – No-Fly Cruise Line (Ocean Category)

The company is part of Carnival Corporation & PLC (NYSE/LSE: CCL; NYSE:CUK).