EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

19th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

Up to £1 where sold

Ashtead Choral Society celebrated Surrey's Vaughan Williams.

17 March 2023



Andrew Storey conducts the **Ashtead Choral Society** with enthusiasm and vigour, presenting them at their best in this delightful programme, showing off a range of music by Ralph Vaughan Williams in the 150th anniversary year of his birth. A review of the concert held on 25th February in Epsom.

Starting the evening with **Vaughan Williams**' Five Mystical songs, the choir began with a warm and harmonious sound, which remained well balanced and well blended throughout the evening. Accompanied solely by **Stephen Ridge** on the piano, the sound filled the wonderful acoustics of **St Martin's Church in Epsom**. The choir provided excellent support to the baritone soloist, Daniel Tate, who gave an especially commendable performance as a last minute stand-in, and whose tone and clarity propelled the storytelling of RVW's Mystical Songs. The choir especially shone as the focal point in the 3rd song, demonstrating a beautiful understanding of tonality, and picked up the pace for the 5th song – the well-known 'Let all the world' – with an injection of energy to finish off.

The second piece of the evening was The Lark Ascending, played by The Kent Sinfonia with Christian Halstead as lead and violin soloist. As one of Vaughan Williams' most famous pieces, and an award-winning performance behind Halstead, the audience had a lot to look forward to, and it was as outstanding as we could have imagined!

The orchestra crafted a full-bodied sound and yet took no attention away from the exquisite violin solo, which had the audience mesmerised.

The second half began the titular piece of the evening, Vaughan Williams' Sea Symphony. Demonstrating strong entries all round, the choir and orchestra provided a majestic sound, with especially impressive lone chorus entries standing up to the magnificent sound of the orchestra. We also had our first entry of the soprano soloist **Eleanor Pennell-Briggs**, who gave another sparkling performance. My own conductor often tells me that "Musicians must be actors!", which both soloists and ACS demonstrated beautifully this evening, conveying the power and emotion of the sea.

The symphony continues with some elegant call and response passages, well executed by both choir and orchestra, and it was especially pleasing when the main melody passes around the orchestra sections. The scherzo then starts, feeling energetic and urgent, with the chromatic passages handled with great skill and empathy by the choir. The dynamic contrasts by both parties provide drama, again echoing the feelings of the sea.

The final movement begins cinematic and sweeping, with precision by the chorus when they are left exposed. There is power when the basses sing alone, with a great contrast to the delicate female voices. The orchestra and soloists have a moment to shine on their own, with both soloists again demonstrating exceptional storytelling, before the chorus returns for the start of the finale. The regal fanfare from the horns and the vivid energy from the choir draws to a close to finish up the piece.

Overall both ACS and Kent Sinfonia provided a thoroughly enjoyable evening, showcasing a range of musical talent and shining a spotlight onto Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Lizzie McCaffrey

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY