

Epsom Symphony Orchestra: A Cornerstone of Local Musical Excellence

11 December 2024



The Epsom Symphony Orchestra, a cherished fixture in the town's cultural landscape, has been delighting audiences since its founding in 1951. Over its decades-long history, the orchestra has shared the stage with numerous esteemed soloists, including pianists Phyllis Sellick, Eileen Joyce, and Semprini, clarinettist Gervase de Peyer, and, more recently, the internationally acclaimed pianist Benjamin Grosvenor.

Currently under the direction of its long-serving musical director **Darrell Davison**, the orchestra performs four concerts annually at the **Epsom Playhouse**. Mr. Davison, who has led the orchestra since 1981, brings an impressive musical pedigree to the role. A scholar of both Charterhouse and St Catherine's College, Cambridge, Davison began his career as the principal cellist of the Ulster Orchestra before transitioning to conducting. A winner of the Sir John Barbiroli Conducting Competition in 1979 and a prize winner at the inaugural Leeds Conducting Competition in 1984, Davison has conducted major ensembles across England, including all four London orchestras, and has appeared at venues such as the Royal Festival Hall.

The Epsom Symphony Orchestra comprises a blend of professional musicians and dedicated amateurs, creating a vibrant and inclusive musical community. Among its members is leader **Julia Burkert**, a German-born violinist who studied on scholarship in Canada and Scotland before establishing a successful freelance career in London. The orchestra's ethos of collaboration and shared passion for music resonates strongly with its members, many of whom describe it as a "musical family."

The orchestra recently performed its annual Christmas concert to a packed audience at the Playhouse. The festive program featured interactive elements that encouraged audience participation, adding to the warm and lively atmosphere. This year's Christmas concert continued a tradition of welcoming celebrity narrators for musical pantomimes, with past guests including Johnny Morris, Wayne Sleep, and Lionel Blair.

Looking ahead, the orchestra's next concert on 23rd March promises a compelling program of classical masterworks. Highlights include Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Overture*, Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* with Cypriot pianist Christos Fountos as the soloist, and Shostakovich's emotionally charged Fifth Symphony. Mr. Fountos, born in Nicosia in 1997, began his piano studies at the age of five and made his orchestral debut at 17 with the Cyprus Symphony Orchestra.

The orchestra's commitment to nurturing local talent and delivering high-quality performances continues to enrich Epsom's cultural life. It is also actively seeking new players of a good standard to join its ranks, ensuring its legacy endures for years to come. For more information, prospective musicians and concertgoers are encouraged to visit the orchestra's website. <http://www.epsomsymphony.co.uk/>

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"The Wizard of Oz" works its magic in Epsom

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Friday 15th December was opening night for this seasons annual pantomime at the **Epsom Playhouse**. **Kate Spiller**, founder of the production company said "We are delighted to present the classic tale of 'THE WIZARD OF OZ' ... This well known story follows Dorothy in her adventures along the 'Yellow Brick Road: Her 3 great friends -The Lion, Tin Man and The Scarecrow join her in her search for the Wonderful Wizard. We have stuck very closely to the original story line with our production, although this talented cast have added much comedy and humour."

She added "Many thanks must be given to **Mrs Elaine Teague** and her team at the Playhouse, who work very hard

throughout the year to bring you a whole array of theatrical productions. Special thanks are also due to the great number of ‘mums and dads’ that have driven their children to rehearsals and performances over the last few weeks allowing us to have over 200 Munchkins in the show and opening up a whole new world to these talented youngsters.”

The players maintained a giddy momentum and energy throughout a packed programme of dance routines, pantomime banter and adult innuendoes.

The synchronization of vivid computer animated backdrops, a lively sound-track and the stage actions worked wonders in creating the dream-like qualities at the heart of the Wizard of Oz experience.

Sadly, copyright issues and cost mean the songs we are familiar with from the original “Judy Garland” film version will not be sung at the Playhouse.

Shining though were the performances of Emily Day as Dorothy, Rikki Stone’s scarecrow and though unpopular in the traditional way, Jake Anthony Pearse’s charismatic role as the Wicked Witch was appreciated at the final curtain.

The Lisa Jayn dancers didn’t miss a beat in a variety of the main dance routines.

No less than six local young persons dance groups sourced the 200 little munchkins. None could have been taller than 4 feet. 20 were on stage at a time and performed with great professionalism. They included The Arnould School of Dancing, Gemini Dancers, The Italia Conti - Reigate, Joco Dance and Theatre Arts, Starstruck and Epsom’s Terri-Jayne’s School of Dance.

The success of the night is a tribute to the workings of an Epsom and Ewell Borough Council owned and managed arts venue, working in collaboration with artists in the private sector.

You can get tickets for performances through to 1st January 2024 via the Epsom Playhouse box office. Even at the full adult price of £25 the entertainment is good value for money and no commuting necessary.

Advocate for Epsom’s underdog remembered

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Roger Bristow was by a long stretch one of Epsom and Surrey’s most successful criminal court defence advocates, dedicated to ensuring that all his clients received fair justice regardless of their guilt. He plied his profession at the Epsom Magistrates Court and many others in Surrey and the South East. Due to his prowess, he had many repeat customers.

A Law graduate of Bristol University where he met his wife Eileen, who survives him, he served his articles with the firm Lloyd and Davy and later became a partner in the (now demised firm) Kirkwoods. Both firms had offices conveniently located close to the centre of Epsom and a short walk from the local hostelrys where he met many clients. He then became an independent advocate acting for several local firms of solicitors until he retired.

As a former client Martin Knight (author and local historian) remembers, “Roger was the ‘go to’ solicitor for Epsom youngsters who got into trouble with the law, helping them to find in court the best way through or out of the situations in which their behaviour or bad luck had landed them, whether the result was an acquittal or a fair sentence.

“I recall an incident when I and a few rowdy friends were passing the house of an off duty police sergeant en route home from the Plough Pub in Ewell. In the belief we were vandalizing his garden, the policeman charged out of his house in his pyjamas brandishing a truncheon, and pinned me to the ground. After arrest I was charged with attempted criminal damage (there was none). When asked by Roger in court why he had not shown us his police ID, the sergeant stated that he had not had time. Yet as Roger pointed out, he had found time to pick up his truncheon. The case was dismissed.”

Roger was a well known local character in Epsom and invariably the soul of every party. He could hold court with his anecdotes, humour and sideways look at life. Roger served as a Conservative Councillor in Richmond on Thames for 4 years and later became a supporter of UKIP. Never one to hold back his views, he was yet much loved by all who knew him, whether they agreed with his politics or not.

It was my good fortune, as his articulated clerk (1984 – 1986) to be inspired by his advocacy. He had genuine compassion for the ‘mad and bad’ who are so often trapped in circumstances somewhat beyond their ability to control. Many clients continued to contact him for informal advice long after their encounters with the courts had ceased.

A fan of local pubs, the Surrey countryside, his cat, Mahler, Noel Coward and the Daily Telegraph, in retirement Roger

enjoyed long holidays and cruises with Eileen until Alzheimers exerted its limitations. He died suddenly on 9th September 2023.

Roger John Bristow 19th October 1944 – 9th September 2023.

ESO and a Moldovan “rock” an Epsom audience.

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Sunday 15th May 2022 local music lovers gathered for Epsom Symphony Orchestra’s second concert of the year. Long-standing conductor Darrell Davison introduced the programme with his customary relaxed style. Edward Elgar, the 20th century’s quintessential English composer, borrowed his 18th century predecessor, George Handel’s strings and two oboe Overture in D Minor and converted the work for a full symphony orchestra. The unmistakable Elgarian tones overlaid a familiar Handelian form.

Now warmed up ESO’s 52 players embraced Brahms’ violin concerto with gusto and together with young Moldovan violinist Ionel Manciu demonstrated the acoustic prowess of Epsom Playhouse’s main auditorium. Not a single nuanced whisper of Manciu’s strings could be missed from the back of the Hall. As if Manciu’s technical skills had not been demonstrated enough during his improvisations in the 2nd movement he treated his audience to an encore of Grigora Dinicu’s “The Clock,” where the tick-tock of time was plucked from the neck of his instrument with his left-hand rather than the usual right bow-hand near the bridge.

The concert ended with Dvorak’s next most popular symphony after “The New World” 9th, namely the 8th. If there is any doubt about the value for money and time attending your local orchestra performing in a local venue, then the final stupendous bars of the Symphony, being played with an energy and precision equal to anything you might hear in a London concert hall, set those doubts to rest.

ESO’s next concert is on Saturday 15th October 2022 featuring Nielsen’s Helios Overture, Grieg’s Piano Concerto and Sibelius’s Second Symphony. Visit www.epsomsymphony.co.uk and Epsom Playhouse for tickets. Do support your local orchestra. In particular encourage the Borough’s younger generation to experience the excitement of 54 skilled musicians on stage “rocking” with sounds that only ignorance stands in the way of enjoying.

By our special and independent music correspondent – Lionel Blackman.