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Ukrainian Independence Day celebrated with music, film and community spirit in Epsom

25 August 2026



Epsom Picturehouse was filled to capacity yesterday afternoon as the local community came together to mark Ukrainian Independence Day with an afternoon celebrating Ukrainian culture, music and film.

The event began in the Picturehouse foyer, where three young Ukrainians performed a selection of Ukrainian songs. Singer **Diana Zadorizhna**, guitarist **Vlad Verteba** and percussionist **Vlad Voloshin** provided live music as audiences gathered before the film screening.

Visitors were also able to browse a colourful display of Ukrainian crafts, handmade by local Ukrainian women. The crafts offered a glimpse into Ukraine's rich artistic traditions and gave members of the community an opportunity to share something of their heritage with their neighbours in Epsom.

Nina Kaye of **Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network** welcomed the audience, and the afternoon began with everyone standing to sing the Ukrainian national anthem.

Roy Deadman, founder of **Surrey Stands with Ukraine**, introduced the film and spoke about the importance of cultural exchange and of continuing to share Ukrainian culture with the wider community.

The audience went on to enjoy *Mavka: The Forest Song*, one of Ukraine's most successful animated films. Inspired by Ukrainian folklore and Lesya Ukrainka's celebrated 1911 drama *The Forest Song*, the film combines fantasy, romance, comedy and music with a powerful celebration of Ukraine's natural and cultural heritage.

The screening attracted a full house, demonstrating once again the strong support that the local community continues to show for Ukrainians living in the area. For those attending, the event was not simply a film screening, but an opportunity to come together, celebrate Ukrainian identity and culture, and strengthen the friendships that have grown between Ukrainians now living in Epsom and the wider community.

The enthusiastic response reflected the continuing message of solidarity that has characterised local support for Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion: Ukrainian culture is alive, vibrant and something to be shared and celebrated.

Nina Kaye

Epsom celebrates Ukrainian culture at Festival of Friendship

25 August 2026



The Festival of Friendship – Ukraine brought a vibrant celebration of Ukrainian culture to Epsom from 27 January to 1 February, uniting local organisations and residents in a week of art, music, film and hands-on creativity. Organised jointly by Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Epsom Library and Epsom Picturehouse, the festival highlighted both the richness of Ukrainian traditions and the strong connection between the Ukrainian community and the community of Epsom and Ewell.

The festival was inspired by a cultural project created by Sofia Ziatyk for her final degree work at Chelsea College of Arts,

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for which she was awarded First Class Honours. Her project explored Ukrainian crafts, rituals and traditions through striking hand-drawn images, forming the heart of the exhibition that anchored the week's programme.

The official launch event took place on 27 January at Epsom Library and was attended by senior figures from Surrey County Council, the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, and around 100 members of the local community. The atmosphere was one of warmth and curiosity, as visitors gathered to view Sofia Ziatyk's exhibition and to hear live performances by Ukrainians living in and around Epsom. Traditional music and poetry created a powerful sense of shared experience, giving audiences a glimpse into the traditions and artistic life of Ukraine.

Throughout the week, the library hosted two exhibitions: the display of Sofia Ziatyk's drawings and Inna Kucherenko's *This Is Me: Recreating* – a display of lost photographs and fragments of forgotten history recreated from memory using AI. A special treasure hunt for children invited them to search for pictures and symbols connected with Ukraine, helping younger residents engage with another culture in a fun and accessible way. This initiative proved popular with families and reinforced the festival's emphasis on learning through participation.

Workshops formed a key part of the festival and were consistently well attended by the local community. Participants had the opportunity to try traditional embroidery and beading techniques, make wool dolls, explore paper cutting and experiment with block printing. These sessions offered more than creative activity; they provided space for conversation, storytelling and mutual understanding. Among those taking part was local MP Helen Maguire, whose presence underlined the importance of the festival as both a cultural and community-building event.

The festival also extended beyond the library into the world of cinema. Epsom Picturehouse, working in collaboration with TalentedU, screened three Ukrainian films: *Rocky Road to Berlin*, *Sanatorium* and *Home for Ukraine*. Audience demand exceeded expectations, with each screening so well attended that a second screen had to be opened. The films offered different perspectives on Ukrainian life and history, giving viewers insight into personal stories and national experiences rarely seen in mainstream cinema.

For many attendees, the festival provided an opportunity not only to discover Ukrainian traditions but also to meet Ukrainian neighbours and hear their voices directly through art and performance. The blend of visual exhibitions, live music and poetry, practical workshops and film created a programme appealing to a wide range of interests and ages, demonstrating how culture can act as a bridge between communities, fostering empathy and connection.

Speaking about the events, Councillor Clive Woodbridge, Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, said: "The Festival of Friendship – Ukraine was a truly uplifting and inspiring occasion. It was incredibly moving to see Ukrainian guests of all ages demonstrate how much the creative basis of their culture means to them, whether that be through music, singing or poetry. It was particularly heart-warming to see the younger members of the Ukrainian community perform with such confidence and feeling."

Organisers described the festival as a true partnership between local institutions and residents. By bringing together Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Epsom Library and Epsom Picturehouse, the project showed what can be achieved through collaboration and shared purpose. The success of the events – from the packed workshops to the oversubscribed film screenings – reflected the enthusiasm of the Epsom community for meaningful cultural exchange.

Originating in the work of a young artist and carried forward by community organisations, the Festival of Friendship – Ukraine transformed everyday spaces into places of discovery and dialogue. For one week, Epsom became a window into Ukrainian culture, reminding all who attended that art and tradition can unite people across borders and experiences.

Nina Kaye

Mayor Leach with Sofia Ziatyk

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Epsom Christmas Concert Triumphs After Last-Minute Conductor Crisis

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What could have been a genuine crisis for Epsom Choral Society's Christmas Concert on Saturday became a remarkable story of teamwork, professionalism, and musical courage.

The day began with unwelcome news. Early in the morning, Musical Director, Julian Collings, phoned to say he had been struck down with flu and was unable to conduct that evening's concert. This was to be no ordinary performance: it was completely sold out and featured two world premieres, making cancellation unthinkable.

From his sickbed, Julian immediately set about trying to find a replacement conductor for the evening. His first call was to Neil Ferris, conductor of the Leith Hill Music Festival. Unfortunately, Neil was unable to step in at such short notice, but he suggested a name: Victoria Ely. Crucially, ECS Chair, Helen Phillips, was able to recommend her with confidence, having seen Victoria in action when she took a rehearsal for Neil at one of the Leith Hill Music Festival rehearsals last Spring.

Victoria Ely, who had never met the choir before, bravely agreed to conduct the concert with just four hours' notice.

Meanwhile, Julian faced another formidable task. From home, he painstakingly scanned all of his marked-up scores – 20 different pieces, the parts for the brass quintet, and his detailed annotations and introductory notes. These were sent at speed to the ECS's Concert Management team, who rushed to print everything so it could be placed in Victoria's hands as soon as she arrived and so the brass had something to play! It was a race against the clock, but by 1pm everything was in place.

That afternoon's rehearsal was necessarily intense. Rather than imposing her own methods, Victoria immediately showed her musicianship and collaborative spirit by asking the choir to demonstrate how each piece had been rehearsed. She listened carefully, adapted quickly, and worked with the choir's established approach, creating a sense of trust and calm despite the extraordinary circumstances.

By the time the evening concert arrived, what might have felt like an emergency substitution instead felt like a confident partnership. Victoria conducted with assurance, clarity, and good humour, guiding the choir through a demanding and varied programme. Her warm presence and engaging manner extended to the audience, who responded with enthusiasm and obvious enjoyment.

Against all odds, the concert was not merely rescued, it was a resounding success. For Epsom Choral Society the evening became a powerful reminder of the strength of its musical community and the generosity of fellow professionals. Thanks to Julian's determination, Helen's quick thinking, the Concert Manager's efficiency , and above all Victoria Ely's courage and skill, a potential disaster was transformed into a memorable and uplifting Christmas celebration.

Nina Kaye

From Ukraine to Epsom: How Music and Kindness Struck the Right Note

25 August 2026



When the Ukraine National Opera arrived in the UK on tour in early 2022, none of its musicians could have imagined how the world, and their lives, were about to change. Two weeks later, Russia invaded Ukraine. Many members of the orchestra, seeing the escalating conflict at home, made the painful decision to remain in the UK and claim asylum. Among them was clarinettist and saxophonist Vlad Voloshyn.

Now living in Epsom with local resident Nina Kaye, one of the founders of the Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network, Vlad has continued to rebuild his life through music. Together with five of his former orchestra colleagues, he formed a brass ensemble called Freedom Pulse, which performs Ukrainian and classical repertoire across Surrey and beyond.

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Alongside his performing career, Vlad is in his final year at the British Institute of Modern Music (BIMM) in Fulham, where he studies music and sound production and hopes to work as a sound designer after he graduates.

Recently, an extraordinary act of local generosity brought his story full circle. Vlad had long hoped to buy a tenor saxophone, an instrument essential for his expanding repertoire but out of reach financially. By chance, his host Nina, who also volunteers for Nucleo, a London-based social action charity that helps children from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to music, received an email offering a donated tenor saxophone. Nina runs Nucleo's National Instrument Bank, which matches donated instruments with musicians in need.

The offer came from a donor in the Lake District. Determined and hopeful, Vlad took the long train journey north to collect what he thought was a tenor saxophone. Only on the journey home did he discover it was actually an alto sax, an instrument he already owned. Disheartened, he returned to Epsom unsure how to continue his search.

A few days later, Vlad was performing at a Ukrainian Music Evening in Epsom, attended by His Worshipful The Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, Councillor Robert Leach. Sitting beside the Mayor, Nina recounted Vlad's misadventure with the saxophone. Without hesitation, Councillor Leach said, "I've got a tenor sax at home which I haven't played for 30 years and he would be welcome to have it, if I can find it."

True to his word, after the concert Vlad was welcomed to the Mayor's home and given the instrument which left him both astonished and grateful.

What began as a story of loss and exile has become one of connection and kindness. From the national stage in Kyiv to community halls in Surrey, Vlad's journey shows how music continues to build bridges where politics and geography divide.

When Vlad plays his tenor sax in Freedom Pulse's performances, he will know that even in times of war and displacement, the power of human generosity, and of music itself, resonates far beyond borders.

Nina Kaye

Related reports:

Music and dance for Ukraine at Epsom Methodist Church

Music and dance for Ukraine at Epsom Methodist Church

25 August 2026



The 13th Ukraine Music Evening took place on Saturday 25th October at Epsom Methodist Church, organised by Lionel Blackman with the support of the Epsom Refugee Network and Surrey Stands With Ukraine. Extra seats were brought in as the Church filled to the brim.

The Worshipful Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, Councillor Robert Leach (RA Nonsuch), opened the event with words of welcome and appreciation for the town's ongoing solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

For the first time, the programme featured a Ukrainian dance ensemble — **Stephania**, choreographed and led by **Alina Luts** — whose performances introduced vibrant movement and colour between the musical sets.

The modern section of the programme offered a change of mood. Epsom-based performers **Helin Konyar** (vocals), a graduate of Epsom's Laine Theatre Arts and **Vladislav Voloshin** (saxophone) presented three songs: *Almost There* (Anika Noni Rose), *Dream a Little Dream* (Robbie Williams) and the Ukrainian favourite *Stari Fotohrafiyi* by Skryabin, combining contemporary and national influences with confident stage presence.

The evening continued with **Vadym Perig**, an alumnus of the nearby Yehudi Menuhin School, who travelled from his new home in Vienna to perform **Robert Schumann's Violin Sonata No. 1**, accompanied by the accomplished Ukrainian pianist **Svitlana Kosenko**. Their expressive partnership recalled the high standard of the first Ukraine Music Evening in 2022, in which both artists also appeared.

Pianist **Maria Zhornikova** returned to Epsom with a refined interpretation of **Enrique Granados' *Eight Poetic Valses***, followed by **À Giverny**, a short composition by the organiser Lionel Blackman. Projected images of Monet's gardens accompanied the performance, and the Mayor's purchase of the sheet music contributed to funds for Surrey Stands With Ukraine.

Further performances by **Stephania** included traditional Ukrainian dances such as *My Kyiv*, *Polka*, and *Chycheri*, performed by a talented ensemble of soloists.

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As is now tradition, the evening concluded with the **Renaissance Choir** under the direction of **Nataliia Zadorizhna** and conductor **Dana Kuhlyk**, singing the Ukrainian National Anthem and a selection of beloved folk songs — *Oh, in the Cherry Orchard*, *Why Didn't You Come*, *Why, Why, My Land*, and *Hey, Falcons*.

All proceeds from the concert went to support the professional musicians who continue to share Ukraine's rich artistic culture with audiences in Epsom.

Nina Kaye

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