Biggins departs for good conduct

This was **Mark Biggins**' last concert in charge of **Epsom Chamber Choir**. He may return some day as a guest. The conductor Chamber Choir have shared with English National Opera moves on to take a post with the Grand Théâtre de Genève, a bit too distant to combine.

Auditions for a replacement happen this autumn. Conductors leave their impression on this choir. For two decades **Michael Stevenson** worked on refinement and blend such that you needed to be very close to pick out individual voices from the ensemble. His successor, **Piers Maxim**, liked to entrust choir members with solo spots instead of hiring outside soloists. Mark Biggins has brought an added experience of the opera house, so the timbre has gained energy and exuberance, especially among higher voices, that would do justice to a larger venue even than **St Martin's Church**, **Epsom**.

All these influences were on show in Saturday's concert (24th June at St Martins Church, Epsom). The ensemble retains its refinement, between singers well used to listening to each other. The big and difficult tenor solo in the choral dances from Britten's Gloriana was skilfully handled by **Dominic Morris**. **Neil Thomas** took the baritone spotlight in the folksong arrangement The Lark in the Clear Air. The Britten choral dances, from Gloriana, were straight out of the opera house, with fast tempi and committed dynamic variations creating an aural spectacle.

There were over a dozen separate items, showcasing an eclectic range of repertoire, mostly on a theme of summer but with one bizarre Christmas piece apparently left over from an earlier programme, Jonathan Dove's Wellcome All Wonders. Covid may have cancelled the date when it should have been sung but the choir were not to be denied the chance of demonstrating their prowess tuning its complicated discords.

The audience got invited to sing a refrain in the title number, the mediaeval tune Sumer is Icumen In. A cuckoo has been known to visit Epsom Common. If you encounter it and were at this concert, you know now how to address it.

Instead of more Britten, Flower Songs were furnished by Eric Whitacre. His trademark use of dissonance is more velvety and luxuriant. I have heard it compared to chocolate cake. The choir tuned all the clusters confidently and allowed their audience to wallow in the rich sonority.

Steve Ridge played for the one jazzier piece, by Bob Chilcott, that needed a piano. The other accompanied items employed a harp, more exotic and less percussive and played by **Mared Pugh-**

Evans. She was kept busy, in the Britten dances, in a mystical upper-voices song Summer by Gustav Holst and in two euphonous folk-song arrangements by **John Bawden**. He was singing tenor with Chamber Choir last time I heard these settings but has now gravitated to bass. He composes with a calm facility combined with a lifelong immersion in choral idiom. Hearing these songs was as refreshing as being handed a long, cool drink.

Mared Pugh-Evans switched from subtle accompaniment with hints of ancient bucolic tradition to virtuoso display for her solo item, Rhapsodie, by Marcel Grandjany. Composed by a harpist, it let her demonstrate a vast range of impossibly rapid ripples and resonant chords, sometimes at the same time, while always giving the impression that this is what harpists do for fun.

Epsom clarinettist **Zoë Humphries** joined her for the Victorian Kitchen Garden Suite by Paul Reade, a piece chosen to entertain rather than dazzle. They played with appealing, never forced tone, passing the tunes from one to the other and radiating serenity around the building as the evening started to cool. We heard a Monteverdi madrigal and two joyful, sparkling partsongs by Fanny Hensel.

Then Mark Biggins' valedictory item, a nod to his past studies in America, was Stephen Paulus' The Road Home, which was encored affectingly.

Nigel Williams

Related reports:

Passion in the heart of Epsom

New Epsom theatre very open for business

Set amidst rolling lavender fields, the **Lavender Theatre** will open for its inaugural summer season this July in **Epsom**. The theatre is located at 139 Reigate Road, Epsom KT17 3D

The 250-seat open air theatre will be home for an annual season of plays and musicals with a truly elegant backdrop. Based at Mayfield Lavender in Surrey, the theatre has been co-founded by director **Joe McNeice** (producer/director of 'DIVA: Live From Hell!'), Mayfield owner Brendan Maye and Jonathan Muir.

The inaugural season will open with Irving Berlin's classic musical 'Annie Get Your Gun' from July 17, with music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, original book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields as revised by Peter Stone, with new direction and choreography by Simon Hardwick ('My Fair Lady').

The launch of the theatre will see the completion of a significant investment into the Epsom site, which already boasts a coffee bar, shop, and a full service glasshouse restaurant due to open alongside the theatre this summer.

"This will be more than just a visit to a theatre," commented Joe McNeice, "Audiences will be able to grab a picnic to enjoy among the blossoming rows of lavender as the sun begins to set, before taking their seats in our covered auditorium to watch a show under the stars."

Since opening in 2006, the Mayfield Lavender Farm in Banstead has grown into a major summer destination for tourists and locals in South London, and this year the team are opening the gates to a theatre at their sister location in Epsom.

Lavender Theatre Artistic Director **Joe McNeice** worked behind the scenes at London's immersive 'Great Gatsby', and was Regent's Park Open Air Theatre's Visitor Services Manager until 2022, after graduating from the University of York in 2018.

"The whole place looks incredible, just walking about the site is a real treat for all the senses," McNeice added, "so our shows have to compliment their surroundings and match the sophistication that the natural landscape has set for us."

Speaking of his plans for 'Annie Get Your Gun', **Simon Hardwick** said: "The show will be a rip-roaring staging of the well known Broadway musical in a very raw and kinetic production that evokes the energy of Buffalo Bill's original touring celebrations of the Wild West. The Lavender Theatre will be a dream destination; an environment in which to enjoy a West End-standard production under a hazy summer sky."

The theatre, privately funded and managed by **Lavender Productions Ltd**., will produce its own shows with plans to see the summer season expand year on year with diverse and engaging programming.

McNeice said: "With no public funding or grants to help us achieve this mammoth project, we are relying solely on our Box Office income to build the Lavender Theatre into a profitable business, but we believe that creating a new producing theatre, a proper landmark location for the arts in Surrey, is something worth the investment, for both the local community and the wider industry.

"I'm really passionate about developing new shows, particularly musicals. The location is perfect because it's actually very close to London, but far enough away to have its own identity, which will give us the opportunity to develop work without the vast expense and pressure that comes with opening new shows in the capital. It's an incredibly exciting opportunity."

Tickets for the inaugural season are on sale today at lavendertheatre.com.

A Midsummer's Night's Dream in Cheam

Epsom Choral Society gave us a night to remember at St Andrews Church in Cheam last Saturday. Their programme was an unusual and attractive coupling of works by **Constant Lambert** and **David Fanshawe**. In *The Rio Grande*, Lambert sets a poem by Sacheverell Sitwell for choir, two pianos and percussion, while in *African Sanctus*, written following visits to Africa in 1969, Fanshawe combines African sounds, both human and natural, with live musicians and a Latin Mass.

The concert got off to rousing start with the choir in fine voice, with plenty of rhythmic verve and effective dynamic contrasts throughout. It's worth remembering, however, that in very soft passages articulation needs to be even crisper. I did also wonder whether there might have been slightly more sway and swagger in phrases such as "... they dance in the city, down the public squares...". These are minor quibbles; the performance was as accomplished as one might expect.

Marion Lea, the choir's regular accompanist, took the solo piano role, with its virtuosic cadenzas, while **Peter Jaekel**, a regular visitor, took the 'orchestral' part. Both pianists dealt expertly with the technical demands, and they displayed an excellent rapport. This was also apparent as two pianos became one for the three lollipops from Walton's *Façade* suite, namely Polka, Popular Song and Foxtrot, hugely enjoyed by the sizeable audience. The first half ended with a brief introduction to *African Sanctus* by the late composer's widow **Jane Fanshawe**. During her very informative words and photographs, conductor **Julian Collings** was presented with one of David Fanshawe's trademark caps.

The second half of the concert was heralded by a mighty roar of "Sanctus" from the choir, accompanied by a full percussion ensemble. Having conducted this work myself many moons ago, I recall just how tricky it was to get all elements perfectly aligned – I wish I had had professional sound engineers such as the excellent team on Saturday! A mesmerising muezzin's call to prayer got the next movement under way. Here the gorgeous blend of the voices produced some exquisite singing with perfect intonation. Other qualities such as stamina and staying power presented themselves in the next two movements. The call of the muezzin translates into the key of D, and as any soprano will tell you a very high D lies well out of the comfort zone so full marks to the sopranos here.

Following the Credo came Love Song, a tender and moving episode in which a cattle boy in East Sudan sings about a girl called Abdha. At the start of the movement, we hear a recording of a mother ringing tiny bells outside her tent in an ancient custom signifying the birth of a baby son. In the context of the mass this signifies the birth of Jesus Christ, and as the sound of the bells gently faded the effect was intensely poignant.

The Crucifixus is described by the composer as the "heart of the work" and it features a fearsome mix of war cries, rainstorms and dances, resulting in a dramatic and menacing texture. I wondered for a moment whether the percussion was slightly overpowering here – the war cries from South Sudan, for example, were not easily picked out. A belated mention here of the excellent soprano soloist, **Lisa Swayne**, who managed the wide jagged leaps with great style and aplomb.

The gentle Lord's Prayer which followed drew a lovely gospel feel to the singing, although I did feel that the lead guitar was slightly over-amplified. After a movement of chants and a superbly effective Agnus Dei – with the soloist once again shining in her three consecutive cries of Jesu Christe – a thrilling, exhilarating and exuberant finale brought this unique work to a close. Rapturous applause followed, leading to an encore – a repeat of the Lord's Prayer – during which Julian Collings, fittingly I thought, wore the cap presented to him earlier.

Martin Seath

Related Reports:

Epsom choristers go south for the Summer

Epsom Choral Society opens its centenary celebration 2022

Photo credit: Clive Richardson

Surrey splashing out

Making a Claygate outdoor swimming pool an all year round indoor facility is one of many projects supported by Surrey County Council's Community Fund. Since November 2020 the Fund has splashed out over £10 million. This year sees a commitment of £2.9 million to Surrey's premier theatre, The Yvonne Arnaud in Guildford.

The money will be used to improve the accessibility of the entire theatre and ensure existing and new community spaces be accessible for a variety of new groups, building on the community initiatives and outreach programmes already delivered by the theatre.

Joanna Read, Theatre Director and Chief Executive of Yvonne Arnaud said: "By making this award Surrey County Council is recognising the value the people of Surrey place upon the Yvonne Arnaud and its' integral role as an arts provider across the county. This funding will help make the theatre accessible, sustainable and fit for purpose, better able to serve Surrey for future generations.

"The Arts play a critical role in supporting our health and wellbeing and building cohesive communities. It's good to have the backing of our County Council as we continue our work bringing excellent theatre and arts engagement to the people of Surrey. Our vision for the Arnaud maintains its theatre traditions while building on our creative heart; repurposing a 1960's building to deliver multi-faceted offerings for 21st century audiences."

Surrey County Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety Denise Turner-Stewart said: "This is a truly ambitious project to develop Guildford's iconic and much-loved building into a friendly, cultural community hub and is exactly the sort of project which offers a wider community benefit.

"Surrey's cultural offer caters for all ages and budgets. It is an important part of what makes the county a great place to live, work and visit. I would like to congratulate Yvonne Arnaud who have been successful in their application to Your Fund Surrey.

"Improving accessibility will enable Yvonne Arnaud to build on its existing excellent reputation and become a place everyone can enjoy."

Master Park Pavilion in Oxted, another recent successful applicant to Your Fund Surrey Large Community Project Fund, will receive £1.86m towards replacing the current building with a new fit-for-purpose two-storey community and sports hub.

The Park Hub, set in the 11-acre park will become a valuable resource for the whole community with new facilities including a café, rooms for classes and community activities, improved changing facilities and accessible toilets.

Pammy McNaughton, Chair of Master Park said: "We will be forever grateful to Your Fund Surrey for helping Master Park towards this goal. We knew that our request for £1.86 million was a large sum, but by granting us this amount, not only will Your Fund Surrey be helping Master Park Charity, but they will also be helping the many other charities, activities, clubs, and communities that we are engaged with."

Other projects awarded funding via Your Fund Surrey so far include:

Claygate Community Pool, £363,500 to develop an existing outdoor pool into an indoor facility that will enable the whole community to use the pool all year round.

Leatherhead & Dorking Gymnastics Club, £550,000 to extend the current facilities and build a new gymnasium and sensory room.

Normandy Community Shop and Café, £570,189 towards building a new community shop and café at Manor Fruit Farm

Ripley Village Hall, £645,036 towards rebuilding of the Village Hall, including accessible community rooms and a new kitchen.

South Park Sports Association, £150,000 towards the construction and installation of a 3G artificial grass pitch with a spectator area.

Tatsfield Parish Council, £10,146 to install new picnic benches and planters on the village green.

Weybridge Men's Shed, £30,000 towards the internal fit-out of two sheds and the installation of an underground water treatment system.

Communities can submit applications via the Your Fund Surrey website for both small and large scale community projects and have their say on projects being proposed in their local area **www.surreycc.gov.uk/yourfund**.

Epsom and Ewell's refugee talent

Celebrating World Refugee Week (19th - 25th June) Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network has been celebrating the talents and success of refugees the charity has supported.

Nataliia Zadorizhna is a concert pianist who started playing the piano at the age of 4. She graduated from the Glier Kyiv Academy of Music and also has a PhD in Linguistics. She arrived here in May to flee the war in Ukraine.

Natalia has been appointed as a peripatetic piano teacher for Surrey Arts and also gives private piano lessons. She has formed a Ukrainian choir in Epsom and is a top-class musician who has played in several concerts in and around Epsom.



Ksenia Bugrimova is an award-winning film producer and creative director who has made many films and tv programs in Ukraine. Since arriving in the UK, she founded Talented U – https://talented-u.com/en – a Ukrainian-British Association of screen industry professionals. Here is an example of her much acclaimed work https://youtu.be/ayVgCK-3f00

Samira is a 17-year-old Afghan girl who came to the UK in summer of 2021 and moved to Epsom in May 2022. She is a gifted artist and doing a dressmaking course at college. EERN provided her with a sewing machine and one of our volunteers helped her learn how to use it (as she had never used an electric machine before). Within 2 weeks she had made 4 traditional Afghan dresses and she hopes to become a professional tailor.

Samira has been working very hard at her English, supported by EERN, and was very pleased to pass her driving theory test first time!

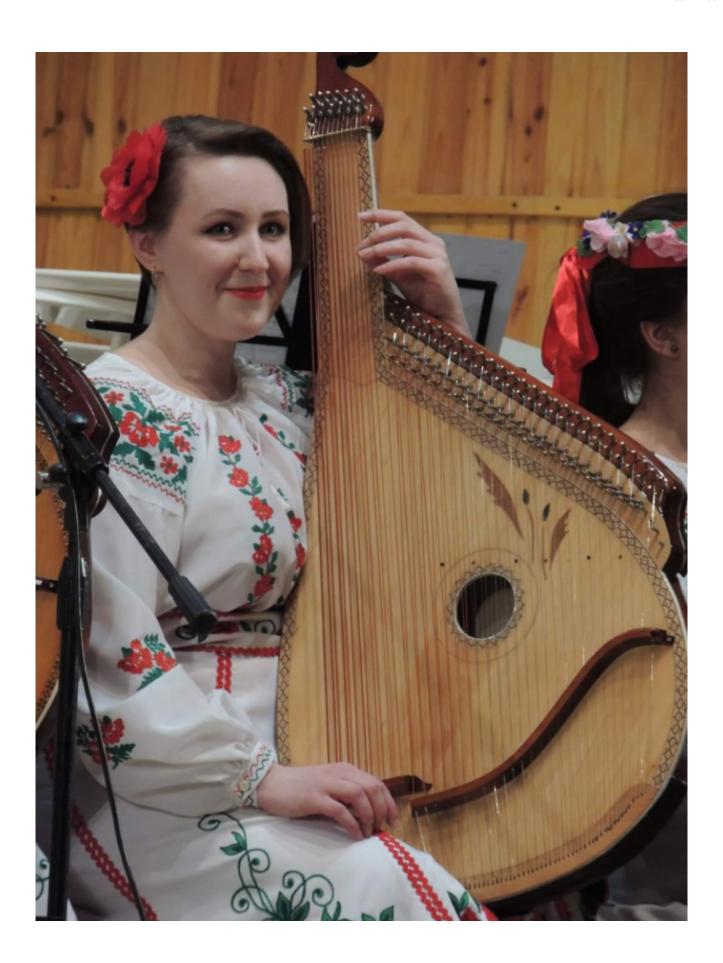




Helin Konyar was studying singing at Kiev Municipal Academy of Circus and Variety Arts when, at the age of 20, she had to leave Kyiv last May. When she arrived here, she auditioned for the famous Laine Theatre Art College in Epsom and was awarded a 3-year scholarship. This week she appeared in her first show at Epsom Playhouse.

Yuliia Komyshan is a professional bandura player from Poltava, Ukraine (a bandura is a Ukrainian plucked-string folk-instrument). She has degrees from Poltava Professional College of Arts and from Glinka Dnipropetrovsk Academy of Music and a PhD in Educational and Pedagogical Sciences.

Yuliia came to the UK when the war started in Ukraine. She dreams of introducing people all over the world to the interesting and rich Ukrainian culture and traditions. She loves giving people the opportunity to listen to the bandura and to connect with Ukrainian musical culture, both traditional and modern. She performs at concerts whenever she can.



Yuliia says that she is very grateful to the government, sponsors, volunteers and new friends for the support which she has received here.

For more information about the work of Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network visit their website. https://epsomrefugeenetwork.org Related reports:

Flight of refugees: history repeating?

Ukrainian refugees made welcome by King's rep.

Cllr Alex Coley: Refugees in Epsom and Ewell

Local talent showing up for charity

EPSOM ROTARY CLUB will again be hosting the **EPSOM & EWELL SHOWCASE** at **Epsom Playhouse** at 19.00 hr on Tuesday 27 June 2023. Tickets at £25 each support an amazing variety of local talent and in turn local charities and local good causes in and around Epsom. The acts consist of:

Cam Brown is a well know local guitarist and singer. He enjoys performing songs by Jake Thackray and often performs in local pubs and halls.

Rhea is the winner of the local Young Musician award and will play "Against All the Odds) Phil Collins and Albright on her saxophone.

Kasumi Brooker, a soprano who sings with Epsom Choral Society will sing Puccini, Mozart, Gershwin, Bernstein, Lloyd Webber and Loewe.

Relive the experience Girlquiding Epsom will bring the Camp-fire to the stage with music!

Protègèm Dance School will perform contemporary dance on stage.

Brass Quintet Come and see a great performance by the Brass Quintet of the Epsom and Ewell Silver Band.

Bharathakalalayam Dance Southern India brings us lots of great Dancing and these dances are based on the Hindu religion - Radha Krishnan, Dandia and Thillana.

Ambition School of Dance Ballet, Modern, Disco/tap dancing brought to the stage by these young performers. They wowed us last year so come and see them this year.

Leatherhead Link Who of us could ever forget the emotional, joyful and committed performance by Leatherhead Link last year. They have come back to repeat the performance and we are looking forward to a stunning evening.

Tickets available HERE.

Surrey County Council co-stars in national CoSTAR lab

Surrey is to be the home of brand new state-of-the art facilities for the UK's creative industry sector, thanks to a successful bid involving **Surrey Council**.

A partnership team, led by Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL), and involving Pinewood Studios, disguise, BT, Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership, University of Surrey, Abertay University and National Film and Television School, alongside the county council, has been announced as the preferred bidder for the 'Convergent Screen Technologies and performance in Realtime (CoSTAR)' national lab.

The successful bid will create hundreds of new jobs and add tens of millions of pounds to Surrey's economy.*

The national CoSTAR lab and three regional R&D labs will ensure the UK has the skills and infrastructure to stay on the cutting-edge of new virtual production techniques in film, TV and live events which involve using computer-generated imagery (CGI), augmented reality and motion capture to create 'virtual sets'. Instead of adding visual effects and CGI in post-production, virtual

production allows filmmakers and theatre directors to create large-scale digitally-generated environments using LED panels that performers can interact with in real-time, as a quicker and less expensive alternative to green screens. The technology has been used in the ABBA Voyage live concert and the Batman and Minecraft immersive experiences in the UK, as well on Disney's hit show The Mandalorian.

The £51m funding application was submitted in February 2022 by **StoryFutures** at Royal Holloway, University of London on behalf of the wider bid team. The application focused on establishing a CoSTAR national lab at Pinewood Studios, alongside associated facilities and programmes to drive innovation and creativity in the UK's screen and performance industries.

Surrey County Council's proposed contribution includes a capital commitment of £3m to fund the establishment of a CoSTAR satellite studio and incubator space on the RHUL campus in Surrey. It's hoped these facilities will provide a sizeable boost to Surrey-based creative industry businesses, with over 200 expected to benefit.

The Surrey-based Satellite Studio Facility is also projected to create 350 jobs over six years, and make a net contribution of c£35m gross value added to Surrey's economy. Both facilities aim to open in early 2026.

The announcement yesterday came as part of the government's **Creative Industries Sector Vision**, which aims to maximise the potential of the UK creative industries and grow the economy.

Along with the national lab, the government also announced that three regional research labs will be based in Yorkshire, Dundee and Belfast. All of these facilities will work closely with Surrey's new CoSTAR satellite studio and incubator space to be located on RHUL's campus in Egham.

Together, these facilities will ensure the UK has the skills and infrastructure to stay on the cutting-edge of new virtual production techniques in film, TV and live events.

Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth, Matt Furniss, said: "I'm delighted that our joint bid for the national CoSTAR lab has been successful.

"These facilities will bring huge technological advantages to UK creative industries and their global competitiveness and it's fantastic that Surrey will be home to them.

"It's also hugely exciting to think of the local benefits that will come from our proposed CoSTAR Satellite Studio and Incubator space. These will bring about local jobs and investment and provide invaluable support for our local businesses, helping to deliver the skills and opportunities for Surrey's economy to thrive.

"I'd like to thank all of the partners involved in the bid for their hard work in securing this great outcome for Surrey."

*Today's announcement of the preferred bidders for CoSTAR is subject to internal government approvals processes, and where relevant, commercial discussions with external partners. Partner organisations such as BT, the National Film and Television School, Vodafone, Studio Ulster and Screen Yorkshire have today announced they will invest at least £63.3 million in CoSTAR.

Epsom choristers go south for the Summer

This year, **Epsom Choral Society**'s summer concert will take you on a journey of discovery with two exciting British 20th century works on Saturday 24th June 2023 in St Andrew's Church, Cheam.

From green and leafy Surrey, Epsom Choral Society travels firstly to **Brazil** to enjoy the jazz rhythms and sparkling piano of **Constant Lambert**'s popular 1927 work The Rio Grande.

In the second half, the singers cross the Atlantic to **Africa** with **David Fanshawe**'s African Sanctus (1972), a work which combines the traditional Mass with an original soundtrack of African music recorded by the composer during his travels up the Nile.

Jane Fanshawe, David's widow, will attend the concert and will give an introduction and her personal memories of African Sanctus. David Fanshawe (1942-2010) was an English composer and self-styled explorer with a fervent interest in world music. His best-known composition is his choral work, African Sanctus, written in 1972



AFRICAN SANCTUS

David Fanshawe

THE RIO GRANDE

Constant Lambert

Saturday 24th June 2023 at 7:30pm

Julian Collings | conductor
Lisa Swayne | soprano
Marion Lea | piano
Peter Jaekel | piano
Percussion ensemble

St Andrew's Church, Northey Avenue, Cheam SM2 7HF

Tickets: £18, £9 (students and U18s) www.epsomchoral.org.uk/tickets Box office: 01372 727078 or 07522 111219



Registered charity number 273757

African Sanctus features soprano soloist, Lisa Swayne, and the soloist playing the fiendishly virtuosic piano solo in The Rio Grande is ECS's very own Marion Lea, a formidable pianist who next year celebrates 50 years as the choir's accompanist! Marion will also be joined by Peter Jaekel for duets from Walton's Façade. The concert will be conducted by Epsom Choral Society's Musical Director **Julian Collings**.

Chairman **Isobel Squire** said: "This is an exciting end to our season, and we look forward to transporting our audience from a gentle English summer to the dynamic rhythms of more southerly climes."

The concert takes place at St Andrew's Church, Northey Avenue, Cheam on Saturday 24th June 2023 at 7.30pm.

Entry is £18, or just £9 for students and under-18s.

Tickets are available via Epsom Choral Society website www.epsomchoral.org.uk/tickets

Epsom Choral Society has been singing for 100 years with around 90 singers. It puts on at least four concerts each year which attract a loyal following. Epsom Choral Society is a friendly choir – it does not require auditions but does aim for high performance standards. Rehearsals are on Wednesday evenings under the baton of their Musical Director, Julian Collings.

Related reports:

Epsom Choral works 100 years

Epsom Choral Society opens its centenary celebration 2022

Surrey Youth Arts and Culture Festival

This summer, Surrey based cultural organisations, creative industries and education providers will come together to deliver the Surrey Youth Arts and Culture Festivals 2023.

The festivals have been developed by Surrey County Council Libraries, Arts Services and Community Engagement team, in partnership with local and regional stakeholders, including Spelthorne Borough Council, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, Visit Staines BID, the Elmsleigh Shopping Centre Staines-upon-Thames, Harlequin Theatre Redhill, Spelthorne Youth Hub, YMCA and a wide range of cultural and community organisations.

 ${\bf Image:}\ A\ youth\ consultation\ evening\ with\ young\ people$

The two festivals will take place on Saturday 1^{st} July in Staines-upon-Thames and Saturday 8^{th} of July in Redhill, providing exciting interactive activities for young people aged 11 - 16 to learn about the creative sectors.

The events will feature performances by local arts groups; talks and panel discussions from creative industry experts; and workshops and activities, with support from organisations such as, University of Creative Arts, University of Surrey, Royal Holloway University London, Amazon Film Studios, Pinewood Group, CCSkills and many more.

The festivals run from 12 – 5pm on each day and feature a wide range of drop in and bookable sessions. To see more information and to book sessions please visit: www.surreycc.gov.uk/youthartsfestival.

The project aims to advocate cultural engagement for wellbeing and creative skills development; de-mystify' the creative industries and creative careers; signpost young people to local cultural engagement initiatives and consult young people on what they would like to see more of in their area.

An extensive outreach programme is planned for both locations in the run up to the festivals throughout June, including assemblies in local secondary schools, activities in the local libraries and workshops to create an art installation at each festival and youth co-design sessions, to shape the creative industry panellists and questions.

Denise Turner-Stewart, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety said: "The Surrey Youth Arts and Culture festivals provide a much-needed opportunity for young people to explore the diverse world of arts and culture in their local area. Through these festivals, we aim to inspire, empower, and support the young people of Surrey, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their artistic talents are celebrated. Together with our borough council colleagues and local organisations we are really trying to champion young people to come together in a space designed just for them, where they can develop their creative skills together. If your child or anyone you know is aged 11 to 16 I would encourage you to get them

involved and sign them up for these exciting free and local events in Staines-upon-Thames and Redhill."

Cllr Susan Doran, Chair of the Community Wellbeing and Housing Committee at Spelthorne Borough Council, said: "During my Mayoral year in 2022/23, I witnessed young Spelthorne residents display amazing creativity and I believe this festival is something that can inspire them further. The council are delighted to host such a variety of activities at the Elmsleigh Centre in Staines-upon-Thames and believe it is a fantastic opportunity for our residents. There is a real range of free workshops and performances to enjoy, ranging from dance and theatre to craft and animation. My thanks to all the partners and industry experts involved for bringing this wonderful initiative forward which I know will be a great success".

"Oh Fate" fills lofty Epsom Church

Ashtead Choral Society - review of its concert on 13th May **St Martins Church, Epsom**. The evening began with Carl Orff's Carmina Burana. Written in 1936, this secular work has remained a favourite of many choral societies as it is great fun to sing and encompasses a wide range of musical genre and emotion.

The choir began with the punchy accents we know so well of the 'O Fortuna' (Oh Fate), filling the space of St Martin's full of grandeur. The first male-only entry was strong and confident, as was the lamenting unison passage to follow. Then we heard the first of the fantastic Baritone soloist Rupert Pardoe, who shone with his clarity of lyric and tone. The choir returned to sing with great joy and spirit, aptly reflecting the 'welcoming of spring' in the text. The Tanz, or dance, gave the Kent Sinfonia a moment in the spotlight, with especially lyrical pizzicato from the strings and the first of many incredible flute solos, again beautifully reflecting the tone and content of this meadow dance. Now into the 'Floret Silva Nobilis,' the sopranos tackled those pianissimo high notes with tremendous grace – I know how hard those are myself! Both choir and orchestra injected some energy into the 'Swaz Hie Gat Umbe,' before switching to a more calming and melodic timbre, again supported and balanced by the flute melody.

The energy returned, and the choir sang regally on 'Were diu welt all min,' leaning in on the outrageous storytelling about the Queen of England, and what a great 'Hej!' at the end of the passage! Speaking of storytelling, what a performance from the countertenor, Richard Decker! Aside from the fantastic singing, the facial expressions of the soon-to-be-roasted swan told us of the dread and terror (and slight comedy) of the situation! On to the men's time to shine, in the Tavern, which they sang very well with clear diction and gusto, and finally we were joined by the soprano soloist Ana Beard Fernandez. Her projection was especially impressive in the pillared setting of the church, and the duet with the flute was a particular highlight. 'In trutina' is widely considered the most beautiful moment of the work and Fernandez's rendition definitely lived up to this claim. The energy began to return for both choir and orchestra in the drive up to the finale, finishing with the reprise of the 'O Fortuna' with the same energy and punch as at the start.

In the second half of the evening, the choir sang 'The Armed Man', by Karl Jenkins. He is known for a wide range of work, recently having composed for the King's Coronation, but this piece is his most widely-sung setting, originally written for the millennium, and subtitled 'A Mass for Peace.'

It began with a strong drumbeat to set the military scene, and a wonderful folk-style piccolo solo. The choir came in strongly in unison, and moved on to a fantastic canon section, really giving them space to shine as it was unaccompanied. The call to prayer was then given by Mr Noor Sheikh from Baitul-Futuh Mosque in Morden, which was a huge highlight, and really gave light to the range of religions and genres this piece calls upon. The 'Kyrie' then began with some moody strings and a gentle melodic soprano line, with the choir overall sombre and well balanced. Another strong male entry complimented the flowing scalic passages, and the choir handled the chromaticism with ease.

The Sanctus was great in spirit with especially clear consonants, accompanied by the sweeping

cinematic writing in the orchestra. Towards the end of the Charge is some quite unique musical writing, where in the score it says 'convey horror!', and the choir did just that! The Last Post, usually always surrounded by silence, was this time played with some eerie string accompaniment at the end and this painted a similarly haunting scene. The altos then had a very strong solo line, and everyone came together for another excellent chromatic passage. The Agnus Dei was a really beautiful sing, with sweeping melodic lines and really great harmonic resolutions. It was at this point especially I felt that the choir was really enjoying their singing, which added an extra something special to the performance. The penultimate section, the Benedictus, was another spotlight on the orchestra, with a great cello solo. To finish off the piece, the final section is broken up by a really fantastic piccolo solo - to get such clarity on a

piccolo and at such speed is really impressive! The choir then interjected with the repeated word 'Ring!,' very effectively passing the melody between the parts. They really did sound like bells, ringing out for peace, as I imagine the composer intended!



Overall a thoroughly enjoyable performance, with two great showcases of popular choral works. I look forward to seeing what ACS produces next.

Lizzie McCaffrey

Ashtead Choral Society is one of the leading choral societies in Surrey with around 90 singers giving three concerts a year with professional orchestras and soloists.

It is a non-auditioned choir and welcome new members. For more information visit wwww.ashteadchoralsociety.org.uk.or contact secretary@ashteadchoralsociety.org.uk