

St Martin's journey from darkness to light

2 June 2025



Ashtead Choral Society and Kent Sinfonia - Dvořák Triumph. St Martin's Church Epsom 24th May.

Let me get straight to the point. This was a special evening and, at least for me, unexpectedly so. Dvořák's *Romance for Violin* and his *Stabat Mater* are very much 'B-list' on the concert repertoire and don't feature on the Classic FM 'Hall of Fame'. You must wonder why when the performance by Ashtead Choral Society, Kent Sinfonia, and Christian Halstead on solo violin was so enthralling from start to finish.

Halstead set the tone for the evening with Dvořák's restless *Romance for Violin*. You might expect a straight love song from the title 'Romance', but Halstead made the most of this restive paean to foreshadow what was to come.

Now, the *Stabat Mater*. It is one of those pieces that is, to my mind, not very interesting when listened to as a recording. But, wow! It comes to life in a performance setting, as Music Director Dr Andrew Storey demonstrated, navigating the orchestra, soloists, and choir through Dvořák's journey from darkness to light.

Each movement is compelling, and on Saturday night in Epsom it felt like reading a great book. As each chapter ended, I wanted to get on to the next one and find out what happens next. There is too much to write about in this review, but to give you a flavour: we were treated to solo quartets that felt appropriately 'cathedral' rather than 'opera house'; soprano and alto choruses that sparkled; tenor and bass choruses plucked from the depths of Bohemia; and, oh, the magical end where Storey closes with 140 performers quietly triumphing over tragedy.

This concert was a very good end to the Ashtead Choral Society season. But there is good news: if you missed this concert and want to experience Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* for yourself, Epsom Choral Society will be performing it next season. Even better news: Ashtead Choral Society's next season will include a mouth-watering line-up: Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*, Bach's *St John Passion*, and Handel's (rarely performed oratorio) *Theodora*.

www.ashtead.choralsociety.org.uk

Jane Pickles, 26 May 2025

Epsom Choral Society Bids Farewell to Long-Serving Pianist Marion Lea

2 June 2025



Epsom Choral Society (ECS) has said a heartfelt goodbye to their much-loved accompanist, Marion Lea, who is retiring after an extraordinary 50 years.

At a special farewell party held in her honour, choir members gathered to celebrate Marion's remarkable contribution to ECS since she first joined in 1975. In a warm and emotional tribute, ECS President Jon Pullinger shared the story of Marion's involvement with the choir, remarking, "What amazing good fortune for us" - her musicianship, support and professionalism have been a cornerstone of ECS for half a century.

In recognition of her long-standing dedication, Marion was presented with a series of personal gifts: a facsimile of Mozart's C minor Piano Concerto (K491), a subscription for a monthly bouquet of flowers for the next year, and a set of four handmade, music-themed coasters. She also received a beautiful bouquet of flowers and a magnificent, personalised cake in the shape of a piano.

Members past and present paid tribute to Marion's extraordinary skills, her quiet professionalism, and the musicianship she brought to every rehearsal and performance. As Jon Pullinger said of Marion: "The accompanist will pick out weaknesses in one part or another and come to their rescue with appropriately judged emphases. We have been so

fortunate in having Marion with us as both fine soloist and consummate accompanist.”

ECS looks back with gratitude for all Marion has brought to the choir and with warm wishes for her retirement.

Nina Kaye

Epsom celebrates romance and revolution!

2 June 2025



Another great concert from Epsom Symphony Orchestra, directed and conducted by Darrell Davison with Christos Fountos the piano soloist. The theme was *Romance & Revolution*.

The concert began with Tchaikovsky's **Romeo & Juliet Overture (Fantasy)** - inspired by Shakespeare. The dramatic and forbidding opening, depicting doom and gloom, moved to a mood of lightness - a faster pace with dancing notes from the flutes - before reverting to solemn chords. The music captured the feud between the Montagues and Capulets. The love theme was special - lyrical notes first heard on the Cor Anglais, then the flautists' melody rang through, and finally the distinctive notes of the harp. Flowing and haunting chords of the ending metamorphosized from hints of happiness to one of pessimism and death, demonstrated so convincingly by the timpani.

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini by Rachmaninov was amazing. Christos Fountos played the piano with aplomb, his fingers racing up and down the keyboard. There were contrasting moments of lightness and solemn intensity. The lyrical melody on the piano was joined by flowing chords from the strings and then the wind, finally ending at a diminished pace on the piano.

Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5 was a wonderfully deep symphony. A menacing theme from the cellos and double basses contrasted with the haunting notes of the violins. Spiky and unsettling chords added intensity, creating an ominous atmosphere. The serene notes of the flautists changed the mood - reinforced by the calming notes of the lower strings. Other sections were fast, with an atmosphere of expectancy and individual solo parts. The Largo movement was introduced by strings with moments of pathos. As the intensity built up, the mood changed. Was it anger? Or determination to overcome adversity? It resolved serenely. The final movement had a strident atmosphere which moved on to more tranquil waters. Unsettling chords and a melody with almost full orchestration concluded with triumphant notes, the timpani resounding through the hall at the finale.

Sue Haines

Baroque to Modern concert by Epsom Chamber Choir

2 June 2025



Epsom & Ewell is fortunate to have many excellent music and drama groups to join, learn and perform with, and for audiences to enjoy old favourites or explore something unfamiliar and perhaps a bit challenging.

This lovely concert by Epsom Chamber Choir gave us contrasting styles from the 17th, 18th, 20th and 21st centuries, all with a meditative quality. Good programme notes were helpful.

In the fantastic acoustic of St. Martin's Church one was immersed in the spacious depths of the sounds; the intensity

produced several spine-tingling moments for me.

The choir opened with *I was glad when they said unto me* – not the familiar setting used at King Charles’ coronation in 2023 (which is by Parry) but one written by Henry Purcell for the coronation of James II in 1685. It sets off in a joyful dance. The top part floated over the others in a plea for peace and it drew to an exultant finish in a wish for *world without end*.

Purcell’s style is perhaps less familiar to us today than Bach’s, so it was great to hear three more pieces which showed his skill in dramatic and plangent composition, and the choir’s skill in their performance. My notes on *Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts* and *Hear my prayer, O Lord say sublime and understated intense anguish* – sounds which produced more delightful shivers up the spine.

Then to compare them with Bach across four pieces – in these there were stately dance rhythms and delicacy as befitted some of the words. *Fürchte dich nicht* (Do not fear, I am near you), probably written for a funeral (it’s a pity we don’t know who commissioned the work), seemed to demonstrate all the complexities which Bach could write in a short piece. I hadn’t heard this before, but it did not sound an easy sing!

In Arvo Pärt’s *The Deer’s Cry*, written in 2008, the dynamics, sonority and breath were beautifully controlled in some very exposed writing, then the very long lines of John Tavener’s *Funeral Ikos* were effortlessly phrased.

Three short modern pieces followed – John Tavener’s *A Hymn to the Mother of God*, James Macmillan’s *A Child’s Prayer* (dedicated to the 16 children and their teacher who were killed at Dunblane in March 1996), and Eric Whitacre’s *Lux Aurumque* (*Light and Gold*, which was introduced as representing light falling through stained glass) – they were full of space, profound, resonant and uplifting.

In the baroque pieces the choir of just over 30 singers had a light accompaniment on chamber organ and cello. Poppy Walshaw, the cellist, also played three movements from the Bach cello suites. This was more music to get lost inside, the two dances leading us into a celebration of life in the joyous *Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf* (*The spirit comes to help our weakness*) to conclude a most enjoyable evening.

Upcoming Events

The choir is holding a **Come & Sing! Haydn’s *The Creation* on Saturday 10th May, 1.30-5pm**, at **St. Martin’s Junior School, Ashley Road KT18 7AD** (£10, students £5, under 18s free – includes music hire and light refreshments).

Their next concert, **‘The Food of Love’**, is a choral tapestry ranging from 16th-century fun, through *West Side Story*, *I Got Rhythm* and *Summertime*, to Billy Joel – **Saturday 28th June, 7.30pm, St. Martin’s Church, Epsom KT17 4PX.**

Anita Littler

Surrey Arts Gala went live in Guildford

2 June 2025



Surrey Arts held its latest Gala concert on Saturday, 15 March, at G Live in Guildford, showcasing the incredible talent of over 300 young musicians from 15 different ensembles. The event featured a diverse array of performances, including original compositions and well-known pieces, highlighting the inclusive spirit of Surrey Arts. The event included Surrey Arts inclusive orchestra UP! alongside its newest ensemble, World in Music, a diverse group which aims to introduce young people to unfamiliar cultures through both western and non-western musical traditions.

Sarah Lee, Head of Service for Surrey Arts said: “*The Gala is a fantastic event which showcases the talent of our young people from many of our bands, orchestras and choirs. The concert allows young musicians to collaborate with others they would not normally have the chance to play with and gives an opportunity to play in a professional theatre.*”

At the event, Councillor Denise Turner Stewart, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities, said: “*It is lovely to be here tonight at the Surrey Arts Gala 2025. I’m really impressed with how hard the children are working. They are really enjoying themselves this evening and the audience are having a great time. It’s actually really moving to see the effort they are putting into their performances, so I would like to say a big thank you to all the staff and everyone who has organised this tonight.*”

The groups performed to a delighted audience with one parent commenting “*Thank you to all the members of Surrey Arts*

staff for putting on such an epic concert! We thoroughly enjoyed it, and it was a pleasure to see the wide range of ensembles run by Surrey Arts, many of which I'd never come across before."

Performances from the Gala will soon be available to view on the **Surrey Arts YouTube channel**.

Surrey Arts' ensembles perform at locations across Surrey throughout the year. Visit the **Surrey Arts Ensembles webpage** to find out more.

Epsom Choral Society Delivers a Classical Delight at St Martin's Church

2 June 2025



March is concert season at St Martin's Church, Epsom. Between Ashted Choral Society on the 8th and Epsom Chamber Choir on the 29th, Epsom Choral Society took their turn on March 15th, with a programme of two favourite pieces from the classical period, performed just the way everybody likes them.

Haydn's *Mass in Time of Troubles*, nicknamed in honour of Lord Nelson, has its moments of subtlety and reflection, but when the string orchestra and solo quartet get augmented with trumpets and timpani, it needs a full choral society sound to rise above it and deliver the dramatic moments too.

Conductor Julian Collings likes tempi fast, making the most of the English Sinfonietta, whose string players' fingers moved so perfectly together they could have been attached to a giant pantograph. That meant the singers, too, had to know their parts thoroughly beforehand—well enough to keep up with the speed of both cascades of notes and a whole booklet of Latin words.

Mozart's *Solemn Vespers* covers five whole psalms before the more familiar text of *Magnificat*, and the words span many human experiences—from justice, compassion, and almsgiving to footstools and skulls. Their weekly practices for the two preceding months had been well spent.

The piece they knew best was the bijou motet *Ave Verum Corpus*, which they all sang from memory. That meant they could rise and fall musically as one instrument and stay together during the conductor's extensive *rallentando* between the two stanzas. The odd forgotten note length matters not at all when the ensemble improves by a leap.

Hearing pieces as familiar as *Ave Verum Corpus* or *Laudate Dominum*, the fifth of those *Vespers* psalms, I am reminded of other times I've heard or sung them myself. Next time I hear *Laudate Dominum*, I shall enjoy being reminded of this performance. Eleanor Pennell-Briggs' soprano voice has a liquid agility that nourishes every note. Meanwhile, the accompanying choral forces took care to supply the harmony without ever being overpowering.

However easy they were for the listener, these classical-period works pose challenges for the singer. At some distance from the conductor, the basses and tenors did well to keep up with his faster tempi. Everyone had to contend with tricks like tuning odd intervals in the many fugal passages, singing on the beat while the orchestra played off it, or vice versa, and at times, half the choir having to sing a whole movement a few beats behind the other half.

The opening Haydn motet *Insanae et Vanae Curae* was the only appearance of the main church organ, played by Peter Jaekel. He found some rich and sonorous colours during the outer sections. I always enjoy his playing, but the choir couldn't quite match his volume. They wisely had to keep enough in reserve for the longer pieces to follow.

Near the end of the *Nelson Mass* is a minor-key *Benedictus* movement, with martial trumpets and drums. I was glad to hear the sopranos still had the power to confidently scale past the top of the clef, wholly in the spirit of a 'time of troubles.' Likewise, the altos were prepared for some telling moments in the concluding movement of the Creed.

The other three soloists had less chance for display than the soprano. Gavin Horsley sang a prayerful *Qui tollis*, asking gently for Jesus' mercy. Beth Moxon demonstrated that she could keep projecting even at the lower realms of a mezzo's range. In brief solo moments, Paul Hopwood showed signs that he would be comfortable in an even larger venue than St Martin's Church. All showed delightful awareness of the others during ensemble moments.

The concert ended with Helen Phillips, the choir's chairman, thanking the audience for providing the motivation that prompted the musicians to put the effort in, taking great pains to make it sound easy. It was a duty I, and all in the building, were very happy to perform.

Nigel Williams

Photo: Epsom Choral Society at St Martin's Church. Credit Clive Richardson

Local Choral group tackles global disruption

2 June 2025



In a world of disruption and disharmony, Ashtead Choral Society provided something of an antidote in our concert *Harmonies of Humanity* on 8 March at St Martin's Church in Epsom. More than a concert, this was an explosive and educational exploration of rhythms and harmonies from around the world.

Our audience may have felt nothing much had changed as we kicked off in traditional mode with 16th-century harmonies—but from a composer based in Mexico. Five magnificent and rarely heard pieces by the French composer Lili Boulanger combined French expressionism with exoticism and mysticism from the first female winner of the Prix de Rome composition. This begged the questions: *what might have been?*—from a composer who died at 24—and *what would she have made of International Women's Day*, which coincided with this concert?

We were delighted to be joined by the Percussion Ensemble of London, who treated our audience to an introduction to the 'kitchen department' with demonstrations of tuned and untuned percussion instruments. Who knew that, if hit too many times, the gong-like tam-tam would likely break the church windows?

The second half saw all these forces come together under musical director Dr Andrew Storey with the late David Fanshawe's *African Sanctus*. Choir, percussion ensemble, lyric soprano soloist Madeleine Holmes, and pianist Steve Ridge wove in with recordings of music captured by the composer in the 1960s along the Nile River (masterminded from the sound desk by our own Chris Turner). The composer's intent was to celebrate one people under music, and *African Sanctus* was something to behold aurally and optically. I hope we provided some hope for and refuge from the unstable and volatile world that our audience returned to at the end of the evening.

We were delighted to receive a letter from David Fanshawe's wife, noting that he had studied under Boulanger's sister and knew the composer of the *Gospel Gloria*, Dillo Dilworth, which we performed twice—once as an encore. We were also delighted that so many of our audience took time to say how much they enjoyed a different approach to the traditional concert format, which included short talks and percussion demonstrations. And we were thrilled that a few audience members liked the evening so much they enquired about joining the choir.

With that in mind, we are recruiting new singers of all voice parts as we grow from a current 100 members to 120. We welcome those keen to join a choir that performs the big choral works with professional orchestras and top soloists.

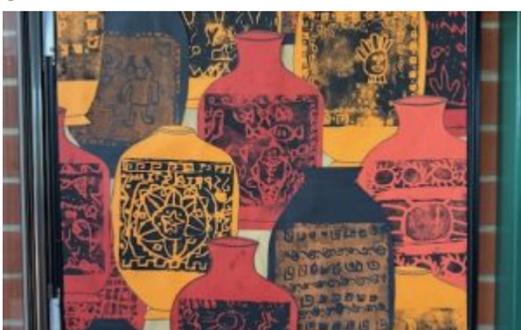
If you are interested in joining, do come along to our free event on the morning of 22 March in Ashtead to experience singing with us and discover the work we will be tackling at our concert on 24 May: Dvořák's *Stabat Mater*.

www.ashteadchoralsociety.org

Vincent Desmond, Chair
Ashtead Choral Society

Young Artists Brighten Up Tattenham Corner Station

2 June 2025



Passengers at Tattenham Corner station will soon be welcomed by a brand-new display of artwork, thanks to a creative collaboration between local students and The Arts Society Epsom.

Led by Carol Skelton, Arts Coordinator, Year 6 students from Epsom Downs Community School have explored block printing and etching on polystyrene sheets to create Greek vase designs inspired by renowned printmaker Patrick Caulfield's *Pottery 1969*.

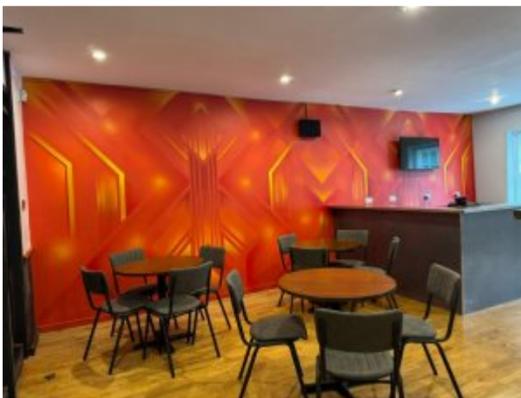
The project has been supported by The Arts Society Epsom, with Angie Child, Head of Young Arts Volunteering, overseeing the initiative. It follows the launch of a permanent art display at Epsom Station in October 2024, created by students from Nescot College of Technology.

Part of the national **Art@TheStation** initiative, the project is backed by The Arts Society's head office in London and funded by Southern Railway. The goal is to showcase local primary school artwork, bringing creativity into public spaces and enriching the experience of travelers passing through the station.

Next time you're at Tattenham Corner station, take a moment to admire the talent and creativity of these young artists!

New artwork takes centre stage at Epsom Playhouse

2 June 2025



During January two new murals were completed at Epsom Playhouse. The murals are part of a series of vibrant public art installations across the borough. Championing the 40-year history of Epsom Playhouse, the large-scale mural in the theatre's foyer showcases the variety and breadth of creative people who have contributed to the fabric of Epsom Playhouse's history over the last four decades. The second mural and new photographic exhibition in the downstairs bar celebrates famed British Jazz singer and a trailblazing performer, Evelyn Dove. Championing the roaring 1920s and the Art Deco period, the large-scale installation reflects the era that Dove was at the peak of her performing career.

The latest murals were created in collaboration with residents. Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, and specialists in community art Positive Arts, consulted with residents during the Christmas lights switch on in the Ashley Centre in Epsom, at Bourne Hall in Ewell and members of Girlguiding Division Epsom also kindly shared their thoughts on the design of the main foyer mural.

Both murals have been fully funded via the Arts, Culture and Heritage UKSPF 2024/25 allocation and contribute to the council's overall vision for curating art projects that build pride with local community stakeholders, nurture creative talent and raise the profile of our borough's rich heritage.

The murals are the last in a series that have been painted across the borough.

So far, working with Positive Arts and community groups, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has created the following murals:

Upper High Street, Epsom - with GLF Schools

Alleyway behind Epsom Square - with Members of Girlguiding Epsom Division

Between Miles Road and Stones Road, Epsom - with GLF Schools

Near Clandon Close, Stoneleigh - with We Power On

Epsom Playhouse opened in 1984 as part of the development of The Ashley Centre and since opening has hosted a wide and varied programme of events featuring both professional and community productions.

The murals form part of improvement works taking place at Epsom Playhouse using an allocation of monies from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Improvements include a redesigned lower bar and a new bottle bar, clad in stainless steel. The upper bar has also been refurbished with new LED lighting and redesigned to create a larger space. There is also a new mezzanine floor, and a new platform lift has been installed to improve accessibility.

Commenting on the newly installed artworks, Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village), Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee said,

"These new murals use a vibrant palette of colours, and I am sure will draw plenty for interest from residents, who'll be impressed to see how this much-loved community venue has been revived!

The foyer mural illustrates visually how important regional theatres are in bringing arts and creativity to local areas for the benefit of local communities"

The refurbishment of Epsom Playhouse also supports Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's new Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategy which outlines its commitment to nurturing creative talent and to creating a thriving and inclusive creative and

cultural outreach programme within the borough.

Related reports:

Epsom Playhouse £1.50 per ticket fee from 1st April

Epsom Playhouse gets a 40 year uplift

A blast celebrates 40 years past of Epsom Playhouse

Our Star shines on Epsom Playhouse

Image: Epsom Playhouse bar mural

Epsom Playhouse £1.50 per ticket fee from 1st April

2 June 2025



The Epsom Playhouse will now charge an additional £1.50 facility fee per ticket as of the 1st April 2025.

During its meeting on the 16th January 2025, the Community and Well-being Committee, chaired by Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village), discussed proposals for the Epsom Playhouse for 2025/26, aspart of their fees and charges agenda.

The proposal outlined the growing struggles the aging Playhouse currently faces, with the infrastructure remaining the same for 40 years.

A major concern highlighted by the report was the technical show lighting, with end-of-life issues potentially hindering future productions. For the Playhouse to provide 'high-quality, diverse, and well-balanced entertainment to support the local community and enhance our reputation as a cultural destination', it was deemed essential for the Playhouse to undergo maintenance work.

The main focus of the Epsom Playhouse proposal was to source a way to finance this necessary maintenance. The report states that 'to support the ongoing operational costs of running the venue, which have significantly increased, we propose the introduction of a facility fee of £1.50 to each ticket sold from 1 April 2025, the income raised annually will be ring fenced for the Playhouse upkeep.'

The Council's senior accountant explained that this new facility fee could see around £80,000 in additional revenue, directly going towards the upkeep of the Playhouse annually. He assured Councillor **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) that the additional fee would be clearly indicated for those purchasing a ticket.

Councillor **Rachel King** (RA Town) highlighted that an additional £1.50 could tip the balance of tickets being affordable for some households wishing to attend the theatre. Other local theatres have adopted this scheme that in some instances is between the £2-£5 range.

Councillor Clive Woodbridge added that there will be regular monitoring of ticket sales to determine whether the new fee damages the Playhouse's box office sales.

The committee was in agreement to go ahead with the recommended proposal of a new facility fee, which will be implemented as of the 1st April 2025. Any bookings made before this date will not incur the additional £1.50 fee.

Epsom Jazz Club Brings Top Talent to Town

2 June 2025



Epsom is swinging to the sound of jazz, thanks to the Epsom Jazz Club - a not-for-profit community project dedicated to bringing Nationally and Internationally renowned jazz musicians to the heart of Epsom. Situated at The Comrades Club, The Parade, Epsom, this intimate venue promises an unbeatable jazz experience, offering a warm welcome to all.

The club, a subsidiary of the registered charity Epsom Music, operates with the sole aim of promoting live music. Other than essential costs like venue hire and promotions, all ticket revenues go directly to the talented musicians. Any surplus funds are reinvested into enhancing the experience for concert-goers.

With no membership required and a strict capacity limit of just 70 seats - all arranged cabaret-style - everyone gets a great view and the same fair ticket price. Epsom Jazz Club is a rarity in its field: no booking fees, no tiered pricing, and not a raffle ticket in sight!

Upcoming Events to Mark on Your Calendar

Thursday 23rd January 7.30pm - Steve Fishwick & Leon Greening Present *SoulTime!*

The first event of 2025 kicks off with a spectacular tribute to Bobby Timmons, the legendary pianist, composer, and sideman to jazz greats like Art Blakey and Cannonball Adderley. Trumpet maestro Steve Fishwick and pianist Leon Greening - hailed as the club's finest pianist to date - lead the evening alongside bass and drums. Expect soulful melodies and toe-tapping grooves in a night that jazz aficionados won't want to miss.

27th February - *Coloriage: Accordion Meets Tango and Gypsy Jazz*

February brings the enchanting sounds of Mike Guy on accordion and Harry Diplock on guitar, exploring the legacy of Richard Galliano. This quartet will take audiences on a journey through Argentine tango, French musette, and gypsy jazz, with works from Astor Piazzolla and Django Reinhardt. It's a rare treat for fans of accordion-led ensembles.

27th March - *Sharp Little Bones with Tony Kofi*

A saxophone showcase awaits in March with the award-winning Tony Kofi leading the invigorating modern post-bop quartet. Fresh from a sold-out London Jazz Festival performance, Kofi's appearance is a must-see for lovers of dynamic, contemporary jazz.

Join the Jazz Community

Epsom Jazz Club is open to everyone, whether you're a lifelong jazz lover or new to the genre. The "Ronnie Scott's" like venue, central location near bus stops and the railway station, and welcoming atmosphere make it the perfect spot for a night of live music.

Tickets are available exclusively via TicketSource

The charity also supports a national appeal providing grants to small struggling jazz clubs up and down the country led by Epsom's own jazz legend Nige Price.

The Redhill Harlequin Theatre bows out for 5 years.

2 June 2025



It could take another five years before the Redhill's Harlequin Theatre reopens after dangerous crumbly concrete forced its closure.

The popular theatre and cinema space in the heart of the town centre welcomed up to 120,000 people a year through its doors before it suddenly shut when reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, which can collapse without warning, was discovered in September 2023.

Now it appears it will potentially remain closed until 2030 while Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, which owns the theatre, carries out the £10m safety refurbishment work.

Council leader Richard Biggs told the January overview and scrutiny committee: "I understand the strong feeling and interest in resolving this situation at the Harlequin.

"I think we can all agree that none of us wanted to be in this situation but the safety risks associated with RAAC are paramount.

"The critical red nature of the RAAC panels means that this is going to take some time to resolve."

He added: "Optimistically two to three years, possibly up to five years to get it back.

"I don't think that's changed from the conversations that we've had so far but we need to get further down the road and then we can start putting proper dates on things."

The Harlequin Theatre is regarded as a key cultural venue in Redhill and acts as a hub for cultural and social activities.

Its closure has forced the council to look at providing alternate venues but early pledges to find a 500 seater venue have so far proved fruitless.

Cllr Biggs has still not ruled out the possibility of a larger venue being found but feels it is more likely that the arts community will have to settle for something less than half that size.

He said: "The likelihood at the moment is that we haven't found a suitable arrangement for something of that size and costs.

"If we've got to spend the money I want to spend it straight on getting the Harlequin back up and running."

He added: "I have said consistently that at the moment, we haven't found any suitable temporary venues.

"We have to consider the cost. I know people think that there's a money tree somewhere, there isn't.

"My priority is to get the Harlequin back up and running, particularly because of our lease obligations but partly because I genuinely believe that it's a huge asset to Redhill and for the borough and for the wider area.

"There are lots of reasons for getting it back up and running as quick as possible and I want to make sure that we are concentrating on the right thing."

He did not rule out the possibility of finding a larger site but added that there is a need for a variety of spaces.

In 2023 they sold about 69,000 tickets at the Harlequin's box office with a further 5,000 sold via alternate sites.

On average the Harlequin Theatre cafe welcomed a further 40 people per day and about 2,400 a year.

The productions would bring a further 6,000 people to the site and room hires an additional 10,000 each year.

Room hires included local churches and the NHS for café Milk and baby weigh-ins.

The council said it is looking for a mix of sites to fulfil these roles as well as audition spaces and performance venues.

The council leader invited interested groups who may have suitable sites to come forward with options but stressed that he did not wish to distract from his main priority of finishing the Harlequin project.

Related reports:

[Redhill theatre gone to rack and ruin?](#)

Surrey's D'Oyly Carte Island concerts cancelled.

2 June 2025



Plans for a summer concert on a private island as part of Weybridge Festival have been cancelled over health and safety concerns. D'Oyly Carte Island hosted three days of music and entertainment as part of the Weybridge Festival over a weekend in July 2024.



The private island, inaccessible to the public for part of the year, opened its grounds last year for Weybridge Festival and celebrated music ranging from Motown and Soul to 70s' and 80s' soft rock. But councillors have decided to issue a counter notice to stop the event going ahead in 2025 over safety concerns.

Surrey Police and Environmental Health representatives slammed the application for its lack of important information to ensure public safety such as the limited access to and from the island, and the lack of adequate protection to prevent members of the public falling into the river. The pair emphasised that no site plans have been shared with officers, nor exit routes or briefing for marshals to judge the safety of the operation.

"We don't want to wait for a tragedy to happen," said Lucy Marriot, from Surrey Police at Elmbridge Borough Council licensing meeting on January 7, "We want to take a proactive approach to public safety." Both representatives argued there was not an acknowledgement of the potential dangers of an island-based music festival and the size of the event.

But Andy Hill, the applicant and owner of the island, asked the committee in a statement: "Was it a mistake that the event was approved last year?". Although Mr Hill submitted the same risk assessment form as last year, the council said its internal procedures for Temporary Event Notice licensing had changed and new officers have come into post.

Serious safety concerns

The council's principal environment officer raised the alarm that no measures have been listed to protect the public. She told the committee the applicant's risk assessment form gave no details on how the event would look after people (who may have had a few drinks) would be protected from uneven paths, the water enveloping the island or the courtyard fountain.

A unique location, only one bridge serves as the connection from the mainland to D'Oyly Carte Island. Almost 500 people could leave the island via the sole bridge at the same time, according to the officer, and no evidence has been given whether the bridge could hold the weight.

"I hope you don't see it as health and safety gone mad," the officer said, as both officers repeatedly urged they did not want the event to be cancelled but wanted the public to enjoy it safely. The council's environmental officer said she had "serious concerns about Mr Hill's attitude to health and safety".

Council documents state that nine marshals and one professional security marshal will be employed to look after nearly 500 people at any one time over the weekend. In his defence, Mr Hill said after the meeting that all the marshals employed for the festival had worked on the island before and so knew the land much better than other staff.

But the Licensing Officer said she did not think it was "appropriate for one [professional security] marshal, one trained person, to look after 499 people and cover the whole island." She stressed that other marshals would not be trained in crowd control or lifeguarding to look after people at the island event, according to the submitted documents.

A spokesperson from the council said: "Despite the Police and environmental health offering to meet with the applicant to discuss and address these concerns, no meeting was accepted. Consequently, our environmental health team and the Police had no choice but to object which resulted in a hearing where the licensing sub-committee refused the temporary event notice in its current form."

"Health & Safety on steroids"

Speaking after the meeting, Mr Hill said: "In 2024 D'Oyly Carte Island held a series of Summer Concerts that were enjoyed by over 3,000 of our local community as part of the wider Weybridge Festival. Before the concerts we met with the police, health & safety, noise control, ambulance services and a few others to make sure we held an event safe for the public. These bodies made some good recommendations and, at a cost of over £35,000, we implemented them all with the associated risk assessments.

"The outcome from these recommendations and the associated investment was no injuries, no complaints, no arrests, no drugs and no disorder, just a flood of compliments. We were asked by Weybridge Festival to do the same again for 2025, so I submitted an application to repeat what we held in 2024. It is a complete mystery why the Council has rejected our application, cancelling the D'Oyly Carte Island Summer Concerts in 2025.

"Were Health & Safety negligent in their duties by allowing the concerts to proceed in 2024? Why have they objected to a repeat of the same event in 2025? One can only speculate that Health & Safety has been put on steroids and they are more interested in creating unnecessary meetings and paperwork, repeating work that has already been completed, simply to keep them gainfully employed at tax payers expense.

"We have invested heavily in bringing D'Oyly Carte Island back to life and have created opportunities like the café, bar, creperie and the D'Oyly Carte Island Summer Concerts. These activities include the community on our journey to renovate this amazing piece of history and culture in Weybridge. All I would ask in return is for the 100,000 people that have visited the island to write or email the Council asking them to reverse their decision and permit the D'Oyly Carte Island Concerts to proceed."

Epsom Choral Society carols for cardiac charity

2 June 2025



Epsom Choral Society presented its ever-popular annual Christmas Concert on Saturday 21st December at St Martin's Church in Epsom. Always a highlight of the festive season, this year's concert was a joyful celebration filled with music, readings, and plenty of audience participation. The concert was attended by the Worshipful, the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, and the Lady Mayoress, Steve and Carol Bridger.

The choir welcomed back **Connaught Brass**, one of the UK's leading brass ensembles, known for their vibrant performances across the UK and Europe. They brought the true spirit of Christmas through their entertaining instrumental pieces and in their accompaniments to the traditional favourites.

This year's programme featured a variety of carols and Christmas songs performed by the choir, accompanied by Marion Lea on the piano and Ben Lewis-Smith on the organ as well as seasonal brass arrangements and uplifting Christmas readings. As always, the audience had the opportunity to join in singing much-loved traditional carols, and filled the church with the warmth and joy of the season.

In keeping with the Christmas spirit of giving, there was an exit collection in aid of the charity Cardiac Risk in the Young (CRY) where over £650 was raised. CRY works to reduce the frequency of young sudden cardiac deaths through vital awareness, screening, and research, making this a particularly meaningful way to support those in need during the holiday season.

Epsom Choral Society's Christmas Concert

2 June 2025



Epsom Choral Society again presents its ever-popular annual Christmas Concert on Saturday 21st December at 7:30pm at St Martin's Church in Epsom.

Always a highlight of the festive season, this year's concert promises to be a joyful celebration filled with music, readings, and plenty of audience participation.

The choir is delighted to welcome back **Connaught Brass**, one of the UK's leading brass ensembles, known for their vibrant performances across the UK and Europe. Together, they will bring the true spirit of Christmas alive through stirring instrumental pieces and traditional favourites.

This year's programme features a variety of **carols and Christmas songs** performed by the choir, accompanied by **Marion Lea** on the piano and **Ben Lewis-Smith** on the organ, as well as seasonal brass arrangements and uplifting Christmas readings. As always, the audience will also have the opportunity to join in singing much-loved traditional carols, filling the church with the warmth and joy of the season.

In keeping with the Christmas spirit of giving, there will be an **exit collection in aid of the charity Cardiac Risk in the Young (CRY)**. CRY works to reduce the frequency of young sudden cardiac deaths through vital awareness, screening, and research, making this a particularly meaningful way to support those in need during the holiday season.

Tickets:

- £20 per person
- Half price (£10) for under-25s

Tickets, which include a **free glass of wine** and a **free programme** with the words of the carols, can be bought online at: <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/epsom-choral-society/t-ojrzldn> or at the **door**.

Epsom celebrates a new Ukrainian Christmas Day

2 June 2025



The vibrant Ukrainian community in Epsom and Ewell and surrounding areas will celebrate Christmas Day for the second year on 25th December. This change was formalized when President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a law on July 28, 2023, moving the official Christmas holiday from January 7 to December 25.

This decision aligned with earlier moves by major Ukrainian churches. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in February 2023 announced its plan to switch to the Revised Julian calendar followed by The Orthodox Church of Ukraine on May 24, 2023.

The shift to December 25 reflects Ukraine's efforts to distance itself from Russian traditions and strengthen its integration with Western practices. Previously, Ukraine observed Christmas on January 7, following the Julian calendar, a tradition shared with the Russian Orthodox Church. The move to December 25 aligns Ukraine's Christmas celebrations with those of most Western countries, symbolizing a step toward greater cultural independence.

The public are welcome to join Ukrainians, their hosts and supporters at Epsom Methodist Church on Ashley Road on **Saturday 21st December** for a special evening of music from wonderful Ukrainian musicians and singers. Entry is free and no reservations required.

A social event starts at 5pm and the music commences at 6pm concluding about 7.15. Entry is free and a leaving collection is devoted to the musicians whose livelihoods in Ukraine have been cut by Putin's war.

You will enjoy a pianist, a violinist, a soprano, poetry, a brass ensemble, a bandura player (a traditional Ukrainian instrument) and a local Ukraine refugee choir in a packed and varied programme.

The event is organised by the charity behind The Epsom Jazz Club and supported by Epsom based Surrey Stands With Ukraine and the Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network.

Lionel Blackman, the organiser said "In one way it is a sad event as it is the tenth Ukrainian Music evening held in Epsom since the Russian invasion in February 2022, which reminds us how long this horrible war has been going on. The music can help take minds away from the tragedies in their homeland."

All are welcome. If you do come you may if you wish bring and share a plate of some finger buffet food. There is no parking at the Church and you should leave plenty of time for travel as roads and rail will be busy.

There will also be time for you to get to Epsom Choral Society's Christmas Concert at St Martin's Church, Church Street, Epsom that starts at 7.30pm.

Full details of the Epsom Choral Society concert [HERE](#)