

Arts plan to surprise Surrey and nation

21 February 2024



In a bold move to redefine Surrey's cultural landscape, a comprehensive strategy and vision for the years 2024-2034 has been unveiled by The Surrey Cultural Partnership (SCP). The "Surprising Surrey: Cultural Strategy & Vision 2024-2034" outlines an ambitious plan to transform Surrey into a vibrant hub of creativity and innovation, celebrating its rich heritage and fostering community prosperity.

Epsom and Ewell Times summarises the highlights:

Vision for 2034:

The vision for Surrey by 2034 is one of confidence and vibrancy, where the county's cultural heritage and creativity are celebrated as cornerstones of individual and community wellbeing. Key objectives include improving access to creative experiences, fostering cultural engagement across demographics, supporting creative practitioners, attracting visitors, and boosting investment in cultural activities.

Cultural Strategy Highlights:

The strategy underscores the belief that culture is integral to societal well-being, offering benefits such as enhanced quality of life, improved mental health, and economic growth. It aims to address existing disparities in cultural access and investment across Surrey, recognizing the county's diverse needs and potential.

Challenges and Opportunities:

Despite its affluent reputation, Surrey grapples with pockets of deprivation and underinvestment in cultural infrastructure. The strategy highlights the urgent need to secure funding and support from both local and national stakeholders to address these challenges and realize its goals.

Priorities and Action Plan:

The strategy outlines four key priorities: ensuring culture is accessible to all, fostering resilient communities, enhancing county-wide cultural infrastructure, and supporting creativity as an economic driver. An action plan details specific initiatives, including the establishment of cultural hubs, support for creative enterprises, and community engagement programs.

Monitoring and Financial Implications:

To ensure accountability and progress, the Surrey Cultural Partnership (SCP) will monitor the plan's implementation and evaluate its impact through key performance indicators. Financially, the plan anticipates a requirement of approximately £2 million over the next decade, to be sourced from various public and private funding channels.

Next Steps:

SCP will establish a steering group comprising stakeholders from diverse sectors to oversee the plan's execution. Additionally, workshops will be conducted to recruit Culture Champions and mobilize community support for the initiative.

The unveiling of the "Surprising Surrey: Cultural Strategy & Vision 2024-2034" marks a significant step towards transforming Surrey into a dynamic cultural destination, where creativity thrives, and communities flourish.

Surrey University's Professor Caroline Scarles, Professor of Technology and Society, School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, and Director of Visit Surrey, said: "It has been a privilege to work with the Surrey Cultural Partnership to develop this strategy that brings together the wide range of vibrant and inspiring cultural leaders, organisations and communities across the county. It is a strategy that has the collaborative voices of the cultural sector as its very foundation. It provides the collective voice and vision for capturing the diversity, drive, and ambition of the county and recognises the central role that culture plays not only for the economy but also for inclusion, diversity, health, and wellbeing."

English music for Lent in Epsom

21 February 2024



Stainer's *The Crucifixion* is a classic of the Victorian era which is still loved by church choirs and choral societies. It tells the story of Christ's Passion with compelling arias and dramatic choruses, as well as moments of reflection, such as the anthem, "God So Loved the World."

The work features in Epsom Choral Society's spring concert at St Martin's Church Epsom on Saturday 9th March. The programme showcases some of the most celebrated English anthems of the twentieth century. In Elgar's "The Spirit of the Lord" the Apostles tell of their calling to preach the Gospel, while Ireland's transcendent "Greater Love Hath No Man" and Howells' haunting "Like as the Hart Desireth" offer evocative interpretations of biblical texts. Finzi's "Lo, the Full, Final Sacrifice" is a poignant reflection on the communion gifts of bread and wine, in the words of the 17th-century mystic poet Richard Crashaw.

Isobel Squire, Chair of Epsom Choral Society, expresses her excitement for the event, stating, "We are thrilled to offer balm for the soul with an evening of glorious English choral music. Whether or not you are a believer, the soaring melodies and gorgeous harmonies of these wonderful settings of sacred texts are guaranteed to uplift your spirit."

Epsom Choral Society is delighted to welcome back esteemed international soloists John Findon (tenor) and Jon Stainsby (bass), alongside organist Peter Jaekel, for what promises to be an unforgettable evening of musical inspiration. Music Director, Julian Collings, said: "The five works chosen for this concert revolve around the Lenten themes of preparation, waiting and penitence. From John Stainer's gloriously Victorian depiction of the events leading up to the Crucifixion to the emotional intensity and heartfelt intimacy of the music of Herbert Howells and Gerald Finzi, this concert presents some of the best and most moving music from the English Choral tradition."

Tickets for "English Music for Lent" are available online at <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/epsom-choral-society/t-moaqzdo> or by phone at 01372 727078.

Tickets are priced at £20 in advance or £22 on the door. Admission is free for attendees under 18 years of age. Each ticket includes a complimentary programme and a glass of wine.

A blast celebrates 40 years past of Epsom Playhouse

21 February 2024



On Friday 19th January, the Band of the **Coldstream Guards** joined residents of Epsom to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the **Epsom Playhouse**.

Led by Director of music Lieutenant Colonel **Stewart Halliday**, the band performed an eclectic mix of music ranging from classic marches to hits from the West End.

As expected the band played with military precision, and there were some virtuous solos from all sections including a stunning performance of 'Victors Tale' from the film 'The Terminal' by principal clarinettist Lance Sergeant **Natalie White**.

The audience was delighted to see the concert organiser and former Senior Director of Music, Household Division, Cllr Dr **Graham Jones** MBE (RA Cuddington) pick up his baton once again to conduct the band, and encouraged the audience to participate in the encore in the 'Radetzky March' by Johann Strauss.

This concert has raised awareness and funds for the Epsom & Ewell Royal British Legion and the Epsom & Ewell Mayor's Charities. With all programme sales being match funded by Barclays Bank.

We hope this will be the start of more world class bands coming to perform at Epsom Playhouse.

The Epsom and Ewell Times is proud to have supported the concert.

Claudia Jones - Reporter

Image courtesy Steven McCormick Photography

Lionel Blackman, who was in the original staff team of the Playhouse when it opened 40 years ago, writes:

40 years have passed since the Epsom Playhouse first opened its doors to professional and amateur performers alike. The Council head-hunted **Graham Stansfield**, a great professional, to kick-start the programme and establish the venue. The first management was in the hands of a then young and dynamic **Robin Hodgkinson**. The theatre came with the development of the **Ashley Centre** by the **Bechtel Corporation**. Originally the main hall's retractable seating allowed the venue to host balls and exhibitions. Today it has fixed and comfortable seating for 406 and a smaller flexible hall space, The Myers, with a seating capacity of 80.

From those early years onward Epsom Playhouse attracted many high-class acts: The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the bands of Humphrey Lyttleton, Kenny Ball and James Last. The Pasadena Roof Orchestra and the Instant Sunshine entertainers came regularly. The world famous Stepan Grappelli once cast his magic violin over a sell-out audience and many many more through to today. Many of the UK's top comedians will spend an evening in Epsom when on tour: Jack Dee, Count Arthur Strong, Harry Hill and many others. It remains the venue for the annual and very popular Christmas Pantomime.

The venue is the permanent home of local amateur talent the Epsom Symphony Orchestra and The Epsom Players among others.

The **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** and all local residents who support the venue can be proud of The Epsom Playhouse and its 40 year roll-call of talent, opportunity and entertainment.

Why not give up an evening of Netflix or YouTube and see some live entertainment at your local venue? Visit www.epsomplayhouse.co.uk

Dorking Halls to get refit

21 February 2024



The "jewel in Mole Valley's crown" is set to shut over the summer as it undergoes a £3.24million safety refit. Dorking Halls has been recommended for the "minimal" amount of work needed to fix its most immediate problems. A decision on an £8m modernisation of the venue with improved seating, bars, toilets, and sound proofing will be taken next year.

Councillor Nick Wright, cabinet member for leisure and tourism, told overview and select committee at Mole Valley District Council: "The halls are a very important part of Mole Valley's cultural infrastructure, with over 114,000 tickets sold in 2023. They are used by residents from across the district and beyond.

"The halls are sorely in need of repair and refurbishment and the particular concern is over the state of the 90-year-old fibrous plaster ceiling in the great hall itself.

"This has to be dealt with urgently as a health-and-safety issue and it also costs us a lot in inspections and remedial patches. We absolutely have to avoid any chance of a forced unscheduled closure of the halls for safety reasons."

Initial studies into the work began in 2022 with three ideas put forward. The first is the minimal safety work, the second an enhanced program to upgrade stages, access and bar areas. The final, which was ultimately not considered, was an aspirational complete remodelling.

The halls would need to close in summer 2025 as well; if the council agrees to go ahead with the second phase of works. The primary focus of the first phase will be to make the ceiling safe. Critical ceiling failure has been identified as a risk. If no work is done, there is the potential that the fibrous plaster in the Grand Hall becomes so unstable that the halls are forced to close at short or no notice.

Any collapse, regardless of whether the public were in attendance, would likely lead to a fine. The report read: "The priority is to address the ceiling at the earliest opportunity, to avoid the risk of being forced to close the Grand Halls to the public at short or no notice, with the associated reputational damage, and financial consequences of cancelling events, refunding ticket sales, and compensating for loss of profit."

It has been about 30 years since the halls last underwent a large-scale refurbishment, when the building was extended and the current layout created.

The cinema was made digital in 2010 with other minor works also carried out. Cllr David Draper described the work as well deserved and necessary.

Officers told the meeting the site is compliant but that it “struggles to accommodate some shows” with adjustments and limitations enforced which often means performances are restricted, or not the full versions performed in other venues.

The meeting on Wednesday, January 3, heard: “We have to cut things to make it safe and workable so it’s not presenting a danger, it’s just a bit limiting and we’re only just managing.” Cllr Wright said: “Dorking Halls is the jewel in the crown of Mole Valley but its getting a bit tired, it needs a polish, and it needs to look much better than it does at the moment.”

The plans were then signed off later that night during a brief, 30 minute long, extraordinary cabinet meeting.

Conquering disability through art

21 February 2024



Conquest Art CIO was founded in Cheam in 1978 by artist **Ursula Hulme** MBE and now has 15 groups throughout England. The members have a wide range of health problems and disabilities and they are encouraged to work using their imaginations creatively at their own pace. This helps build self-confidence and enables people to relax and make friends with similar interests within the group. No previous artistic experience is needed to join.



‘Coronation Celebration’ - a picture made as a joint project by the members of the the Stoneleigh Conquest Art Group

In the past an annual exhibition of members’ work has been held at Bourne Hall in Ewell. This year the exhibition was held online and in 2024 there are plans to hold it at the Horton Chapel in Epsom.

Each year an annual meeting (accompanied by an exhibition) is held at St. Paul’s Church, Northey Avenue, Cheam, and the Charity Coordinator is in the process of setting up a series of meetings on Zoom where the leaders of the various groups can discuss common issues together and share ideas.

Three of the groups are in Epsom and Ewell as follows:-

Epsom Methodist Church, Ashley Road, Epsom, Surrey, KT18 5HU ‘phone number 01372 723966.

The leader is Christine Loizou. Held on Tuesdays from 2pm - 4pm.

Stoneleigh Methodist Church, Stoneleigh Crescent, Epsom, Surrey, KT19 ORT. ‘phone number 020 8393 4116. The leader is Lesley Lee. Held on Mondays 2pm - 4pm.

Christ Church Ewell, Cheam Road, Ewell, Surrey, KT17 1AD ‘phone number 07500 339 168 The leader is Steve Deal. Held on Mondays from 1pm - 4pm. Currently this group has no vacancies.

Conquest Art is run by volunteers with the exception of the co-ordinator. Anyone who would like to find out about volunteering or who feels inspired to learn more about Conquest is very welcome to come along to one of the groups to see what happens there.

For further information please see the charity website at www.conquestart.org

Top image: Caterpillar draft excluder made by partially sighted and blind members at Epsom from coloured wool pom-poms.

Epsom Pianist scores 50 out of 101

21 February 2024



In 2022 **Epsom Choral Society** celebrated its centenary. For very nearly half that century **Marion Lea** has accompanied the singers on the piano.

Marion Lea, an acclaimed freelance pianist and accompanist, has performed in recitals and concerts of the highest calibre, working with the likes of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Bolshoi Ballet. As well, Marion has played an integral part in the local music scene. She has accompanied Operatic Societies, Choral Societies and any number of other talented musicians. As she approaches her **50th anniversary with Epsom Choral Society**, they celebrated the immense and invaluable contribution she has made to the choir with a presentation on Saturday at their annual Christmas concert.



In 1973, **Jon Pullinger**, the ECS president, suggested to Marion that she should apply to become the new rehearsal pianist for the Epsom Choral Society. On arrival at the audition, Marion fell into conversation with the then Musical Director, **Richard Fentiman** and Chair, **Dr Barbara Mitchell**, and happened to mention that, as a student, she had been invited to perform at one of Vaughan Williams' famous parties. They realised it was testament to her exceptional musicianship and waived the audition!

Since then, Marion has been the ECS rehearsal pianist for innumerable Wednesday nights; has accompanied the choir in hundreds of concerts; playing continuo on harpsichord and little organ; and even taken the spotlight on occasion as soloist.

She has supported learning of all styles of music, from the renaissance to the modern. She has played Debussy solos for ECS; played piano duets and, of course, most recently, played the 'concerto' piano part in Lambert's Rio Grande, to great acclaim.

As ECS approach Marion's Golden Anniversary with them, **Isobel Squire**, Chair, reflected on how lucky they are to have had such an accomplished pianist all that time: "On behalf of all our singers, I want to say how privileged we feel to be able to work with Marion, and how much we value her wonderful support in our rehearsals, and enjoy her sparkling performances in our concerts."

Related reports:

Epsom Choral works 100 years

Epsom Choral Society opens its centenary celebration 2022

Expect miracles from Epsom Choral Society

Photo credit: Anne Richardson

Caught the Christmas Epsom Stagecoach to Paris

21 February 2024



20 DECEMBER 2023: Gifted students from local **Stagecoach Performing Arts Epsom** were chosen to take part in Disney's festive show, Let's Sing, in Disneyland Paris at the weekend.

The troupe of 21 students, aged between nine and 19, performed alongside Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Donald and Daisy Duck, and Goofy, as well as professional Disney singers, in a magical and spectacular choral story that was performed four times over the two days.

Taking to the specially decorated stage with scenes from Disney's Main Street USA and the Disney Christmas tree, the students gave a heart-warming performance of festive songs.

The students also took part in a choral workshop with Disney choirmasters and professional stage rehearsals and sound checks, learning how large-scale productions such as this are put together. Skills they can take forward for future performances and productions, and into their professional lives.

Stagecoach Epsom Principal Rachel Crouch said: *"We've taken part in Stagecoach's event, Disney Dance the Dream, before, but this was the first time we had performed at Christmas time. The students thoroughly enjoyed it and learnt a lot from the experience. It was fantastic to watch them on the stage singing alongside such iconic Disney characters, and lovely to be there for the festive season."*

Stagecoach Performing Arts opened its first school 35 years ago and, since then, it has seen more than one million students unlock their creative potential. Provided with the support and dedication of the experienced Principals, the students learn so much more than how to sing, dance and act. Stagecoach helps them blossom into well-rounded individuals, ready to embrace life and all its exciting opportunities.

With a network of over 55,000 students and more than 3,000 extra-curricular performing arts schools worldwide, Stagecoach aims to make a difference in its students' lives by teaching Creative Courage for Life and many children have gone on to study and work in performing arts from blockbuster films to countless roles in local theatre productions. Early stages classes are available for children aged four to six and main stages classes take place for six to 18-year-olds every weekend during term time.

For more information about Stagecoach Performing Arts Epsom, please visit www.stagecoach.co.uk/epsom or phone 01737 669504.

About Stagecoach

Stagecoach Performing Arts was founded in 1988 and continues to grow as the UK's largest network of extra-curricular performing arts schools for children, with over 50,000 students enrolled in our weekly classes worldwide.

One of the first extra-curricular children's performing arts schools in the country, we aim to inspire our students, making a difference in their lives by teaching *Creative Courage For Life*®.

With 350 franchisees and 3,000 teachers worldwide, Stagecoach operates over 2,000 schools and classes and has a presence in eight countries including Canada, Germany, Malta, Spain, Gibraltar, Lithuania and Australia.

Notable alumni are Emma Watson, Jamie Bell, Eleanor Tomlinson, Tuppence Middleton, Tom Fletcher, Dani Harmer, Josh Cuthbert, Danny Mac, and Charlotte Jaconelli.

Find Stagecoach on Facebook at www.facebook.com/stagecoachtheatrearts and on Twitter at www.twitter.com/stagecoach_gbr.

For more information visit the website www.stagecoach.co.uk.



“The Wizard of Oz” works its magic in Epsom

21 February 2024



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

She added “Many thanks must be given to **Mrs Elaine Teague** and her team at the Playhouse, who work very hard throughout the year to bring you a whole array of theatrical productions. Special thanks are also due to the great number of ‘mums and dads’ that have driven their children to rehearsals and performances over the last few weeks allowing us to have over 200 Munchkins in the show and opening up a whole new world to these talented youngsters.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Little Solemn Mass

21 February 2024



Ashtead Choral Society - Petite Messe Solennelle by Rossini. 4 November 2023 at St Martin’s Church, Epsom. A Review.

Rossini’s singular foray into large scale religious choral composition, his ‘Small, Solemn Mass,’ is neither particularly solemn and certainly not small. Composed in 1863, more than three decades after his last opera, this work proved to be a captivating showcase for the Ashtead Choral Society. Their performance at St Martin of Tours church in Epsom was nothing short of remarkable, filling the space with a resounding richness and skilfully capturing the dramatic essence of the piece. The choir’s meticulous attention to the wide dynamic range inherent in the work promised the audience an evening of exceptional musicality and jollity.

Commencing with the Kyrie, the choir adeptly conveyed the dramatic nuances of the composition. The originally intended accompaniment of two pianos (Steve Ridge and Simon Phillips) gave the piece depth, with the cheeky addition of the harmonium (Lucy Morrell) lending a bold, brash Parisian flair to the performance. The Christe, nestled between the Kyrie

movements, showcased Rossini's mastery of polyphonic writing, with the choir executing a sotto voce Renaissance sound beautifully under the nuanced direction of their conductor, Andrew Storey.

The Gloria surged forth with intent and gusto, accompanied by impeccable diction from both choir and soloists – Lucy Cox (soprano), Susan Legg (alto), Adam Tunncliffe (tenor), and Philip Tebb (bass). The quartet's balanced delivery set the stage for individual moments of brilliance with each soloist shining in their respective movements that followed. Ridge and Phillips provided impeccable accompaniment and all the soloists held the audience's attention throughout, despite the frequent repetition of material. The Gloria's culmination, Cum Sancto Spiritu, showcased the choir's operatic prowess, delivering long phrases with excellent shape, dynamic precision, and a deft handling of challenging rhythmic passages, leaving the audience breathless and ready for a break whilst anticipating more to come.

The second half commenced with the Credo and a robust entry by the tenors, imitated by a vibrant soprano sound calling the audience to "believe". This contrasted sharply with the smoothness and softness of subsequent phrases, allowing solo and quartet interjections to make a profound impact. The complex yet enchanting Crucifixus, beautifully sung by Cox, set the stage for the choir's triumphant return, Et Resurrexit, and a captivating 'Et vitam venturi' fugue concluded the Credo in grand fashion; the choir working hard to keep the sound clear and consistent and hold the audience's attention. Morrell's expert rendition of the Preludio Religioso on the harmonium preceded the choir's flawless navigation of the challenging tonal shifts in the unaccompanied Sanctus, where once again the dramatic shifts in dynamics held the attention.

The final movement, Agnus Dei, unfolded in true Rossini fashion, blending the operatic melodic line and dramatic flourishes from Legg with seamless interjections of religious chorales by the choir. By the end, one could not help but believe that one was not in an opera house in Italy with the curtain about to fall. However, in a final twist the piece ended with quiet, delicately placed chords on the piano combined with the bite of the harmonium, thus leaving the listener guessing as to the religious nature of the piece. Maybe then a final word from the maestro himself as he mused in his original manuscripts, "Dear Lord, here it is finished, this poor little mass. Have I just written sacred music, or rather, sacrilegious music? I was born for opera buffa, as you well know. Not much technique, a little bit of heart, that's all. Blessings to you and grant me Paradise."

Ashtead Choral Society's performance was a real cracker and fittingly full of vocal fireworks on bonfire night, leaving the audience with many tunes to hear over and over again as they went into the night.

David Preston

Related reports:

Ashtead Choral Society celebrated Surrey's Vaughan Williams.

"Oh Fate" fills lofty Epsom Church

The Wisdom of Epsom

21 February 2024



The Wizard of Oz is this year's Epsom Playhouse Pantomime. Running Friday 15th December 2023 to Monday 1st January 2024. Book Tickets [HERE](#). And it is a good excuse to tell you about a past star of family entertainment who lived for many years in **Epsom**.

One of Epsom's most famous and best loved former residents did not seek assistance from a wizard when seeking to overcome his difficulties, but chose instead to look for practical solutions and to work extremely hard to achieve his goals, thereby becoming an inspiration to us all.

The story of **Sir Norman Joseph Wisdom**, OBE who was an English actor, comedian, musician and singer will surely be made into a film in the future (he starred in 17 of his own) because despite his enormous successes, Sir Norman Wisdom was just as likely to be seen walking cheerfully down Epsom High Street acknowledging anyone who recognised him, as he was driving his Rolls Royce on his way to London for work.

From having had the privilege of meeting Sir Norman Wisdom in Epsom High Street on a few occasions and given him the thumbs up, I am embarrassed to have to admit that I was not fully aware of how big a star he was until researching material for this article, partly because of how humble he remained during the time he spent living in our town which he only left when his health began to fail him and his family became increasingly responsible for his care.

Sadly, the love and care the elderly Norman received from family members towards the Autumn of his life was quite unlike that which he had experienced when he was a young boy growing up.

Indeed, Norman Wisdom was only 14 years old when he arrived at Victoria Train Station in London, cold and alone and in need of somewhere safe to sleep, having been abandoned by his mother and rejected by his father who slapped the tearful Norman across the face and slammed the front door on him when telling him to go away because he was not wanted. Norman would never see his father again after this incident.

With only 2p in his pocket, Norman approached a hot drink stall at Victoria Train Station late one night and purchased a cup of tea from the vendor who took pity on the young Norman and kindly gave him a hot pie for free. A helpful conversation with the vendor followed and this led Norman to apply for a job with the British Army band even though Norman at the time could not read music or play any musical instruments.

It was permissible for Norman to apply to join the army band even though he was too young to join the army itself. Norman had planned to lie about having musical abilities, but not surprisingly it took very little time for the band master to establish the truth when Norman was unable to confirm the meanings of “flat” and “sharp”.

By putting on what Norman in later life would describe as being the best act of his life, a tearful young Norman managed to convince the band master that his need for food and lodgings would make him a good recruit and indeed, by 1936 Norman Wisdom had become the fly weight boxing champion of the British Army in India, although the number of fights Norman took part in is unclear. By pretending to get punched by an invisible boxer whilst shadow boxing, Norman would make his friends laugh and his ability to do this with relative ease gave him great satisfaction.

During World War 2 Norman Wisdom transferred to The Royal Corp of Signals at Cheltenham and it was during this time that he participated in a charity show in Cheltenham, prompting the actor Rex Harrison to suggest that after the war Norman should consider pursuing a career in entertainment, which young Norman subsequently chose to do.



Norman Wisdom’s big break came when he was asked to perform at The Victoria Palace in London where Laurel and Hardy and Vera Lynn topped the bill, not far from the place where Norman had once struggled to pay for a cup of tea as an unloved, cold and lonely 14-year-old boy who had failed to gain anyone’s attention let alone a large audience’s applause.

Norman Wisdom went on to become a massive celebrity and did not look back after acquiring his funny little suit and cap at a junk shop which became as famous as Charlie Chaplin’s bowler hat and cane.

According to Sir Tim Rice, in the 1950s “a new Norman Wisdom film was like a new Beatles album coming out”.

Norman was a “work horse” who continued to work extremely hard right up until the end of his life, but his busiest period ran from 1950 - 1968 with him becoming a huge hit on both sides of the Atlantic

The photographs with this article include images of a London Palladium pantomime programme dated 1960 which I purchased from the Princess Alice Hospice charity shop in Church Street in Epsom shortly after an elderly Norman had been moved out of his flat off of Church Street by family members for care purposes.

Norman enjoyed massive success in Albania where large crowds would gather to catch a glimpse of him and call out “Pitkin” after the name of his hapless character in a series of comedy films he starred in.

Norman Wisdom's list of achievements is far too long to include in this article and this article is sadly too short to document all of his remarkable charity work.

If Norman had any regrets before his passing at the age of 95 on 4 October 2010, they would probably include his failure to show a large, world-wide audience how good a straight actor he was, but Norman was a man who was grateful for the opportunities life had laid before him for seizing, to the extent that he always maintained he owed everything he had to the army where he learned how to read music and play musical instruments and get on in life after he had been rejected and abandoned by his parents at such a young age.

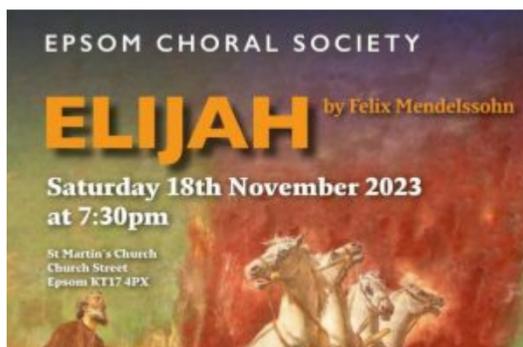
It was a great honour for me to have met the great man himself who returned to England from America where everyone loved him because he loved his children more than the considerable fame and fortune he was attracting there (only Peter Sellers could fill the comic void Norman left behind in America).

Sir Norman Wisdom, OBE will continue to make people laugh wherever his legendary films continue to be shown.

Whilst he was undoubtedly a comic genius, he was also a multi-talented all-round entertainer as well as a very nice man who only allowed his negative life experiences to shape his life and career in a positive way.

Lavish production of Elijah reviewed

21 February 2024



Nigel Williams reviews **Epsom Choral Society's** performance on Saturday 18th November of Felix Mendelssohn's oratorio **Elijah** staged in the town's **St Martin's Church**.

The Old Testament prophet's story was lavishly told with five soloists, an orchestra of strings, brass, woodwind, timpani and organ, and a chorus of several dozen well-drilled and responsive singers under conductor **Julian Collings**.

Your reviewer had attended their open rehearsal early in the term, when **Marion Lea** was supplying single-handedly (well, two-handedly) all the orchestra's notes on the piano and the chorus were learning how their parts fitted together. In the time since, Epsom Choral Society turned early sketches into a complete painting. An "iron" sky could be coloured by high woodwind chords, limping string phrases could suggest Elijah's weary departure for the wilderness, and ringing timpani and organ chords underpinned a song of pious thanksgiving for the end of a famine. Felix Mendelssohn knew how to deploy an orchestra and the best way to appreciate it was to hear it live.

The Choral Society's task was to project their sound from the tiered staging behind the orchestra and unfold a series of choruses with very different challenges. In chordal passages they needed to keep in tune with each other, whereas in complex contrapuntal turn-taking movements the challenge was also keep up with the tempo and find their entries in among all the other notes. *Elijah* is also a big sing. It needs a lot of volume to deliver its full dramatic grandeur. They deliberately avoided over-singing the afternoon rehearsal, so there was still something in the tank even by the final two choruses, delivering whirring scale passages as *Elijah* went by a whirlwind to heaven. Those words ended very loud but began with some dramatic rapid whispering. Mendelssohn's style relishes the idea of light "shining forth". In one of those contrapuntal passages, the tenors, though fewer in number, still had that luminous quality more than two hours into the concert.

Before then, we had heard ample demonstrations of prowess from elsewhere in the choir. Not quite as outnumbered as the tenors, basses had a difficult task to make their entries clear when competing with organ, timpani and low strings but they were up to it.

Elijah is very much an English piece, written in the tradition of German composers working this side of the Channel. Mendelssohn was keen to make his lines fit the words of his English translator, William Bartholomew, and Choral Society made sure we heard them. You don't often hear the word "laveth" in song but we heard it on Saturday. The most German-sounding moment came when the Angels' trio "Lift thine eyes to the mountains" was sung by the choir sopranos and altos, instantly painting a scene of alpine villagers, with a lightness of touch that belied words about a foot that shall not be moved. There were not so many opportunities to show off delicacy and beauty of singing tone. They took that one, and the serene full-choir chorus that followed, "He, watching over Israel, slumbers not nor sleeps." I missed "He that shall endure to the end", cut for reasons of timing, which I think would have showed them off well.

Having an orchestra, the English Sinfonietta, and five soloists was a luxury. Treble Brandon McGuinness, taught singing at Epsom College by Christopher Goldsack, sang a resolute succession of top Gs while the orchestration changed underneath him. It is worth hearing those notes while they last. I have heard John Findon (tenor), Elizabeth Findon (soprano) and Judy Brown (mezzo) before and fully understand why they regularly get invited back. Judy Brown got the show-stopping movement, "O Rest in the Lord". She kept it simple, with a voice both unaffected and affecting, offering half reassurance, half lullaby. They also gave us some delectable ensemble singing in the soprano-mezzo duet "Zion spreadeth her hands" and quartet "Cast thy burden upon the Lord".

By far the largest role went to bass James Geidt as the prophet himself. Accustomed to operatic performance, he learnt much of his part by heart, so when singing he could look to the audience or the other performers. He brought a voice that was rich and treacly and looked the part with a luxuriant Old-Testament beard. His acting skills led his character from pompous confidence through fear and weariness to final moments of joy.

There was plenty of joy. Epsom Choral Society had learnt their parts well. They sang of rescue, perseverance and redemption, themes that were joyful enough, but they could also take pleasure in performing to high standard.

Nigel Williams belonged to St Martin's Church choir for almost twenty-five years alongside several Choral Society members, singing second bass and composing a handful of pieces for them to sing. His edition of Am Himmelsfahrtstage with English translation is available from the Choral Public Domain library.

Ukrainians uplift all in Epsom evening of culture

21 February 2024



On Saturday 11th a choir of locally settled Ukrainians crowned an evening of their nation's culture at **Epsom Methodist Church**. Several folk songs preceded a rousing rendition of the National Anthem of Ukraine, bringing the audience to their feet, right hands on hearts.

Cllr. **Kieran Persand** (Conservative: Horton Ward of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council) welcomed all. He said "*In the face of adversity, the world has witnessed the unwavering spirit of the Ukrainian refugees. They have been forced to leave behind their homes, their loved ones, and the familiar landscapes of their homeland. It has been incredible to see how our community has stood with and welcomed them in and that should be celebrated too. Hosts who have offered shelter, compassion, and a sense of belonging - I thank you. It shows what can be achieved when communities come together.*"

The social and cultural evening was opened by **Diana Zadorizhna**, a young vocalist, accompanied on the piano by her mother, **Natalia** (also the Choir's director). Along with Diana, young **Nika Vlasova**, who played the violin, will enter the first round on Tuesday 14th November, of the Rotary Club of Great Britain's annual music competition, taking place at Epsom College.

Maria Zhornikova, a professional pianist, played several pieces by Ukrainian composer Valentyn Silvestrov. **Yulia Komyschan**, a regular performer at the Ukraine music evenings, delighted once again with varied pieces played on the Ukrainian bandura instrument.

Young **Daniel Stets** read a poem in both English and the original language by the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko.

The Ukrainians expressed their gratitude to **Nina Kaye** and **Jo Sherring** and all in the **Epsom Refugee Network**, that they lead, for the relief they have brought to their lives.

If you wish to be informed of future Ukraine cultural evenings please contact the organiser **Lionel Blackman** at epsommusicsoc@gmail.com

New Conductor - New Sounds

21 February 2024



Epsom Chamber Choir, directed by their new conductor **Jack Apperley**, provided a feast of contemplative music in their Evening Meditations concert on Saturday night (28th October). The harmonious sounds of the well-blended voices pleased the ear in the excellent acoustics of **St. Martin's Church, Epsom**.

In the opening piece, *In splendoribus sanctorum* by James Macmillan, we were soothed by a velvety start before a heart stopping moment when the saxophone began to interweave its seemingly improvisatory melodies into the texture. The piece ended with echoing instrumental phrases from the back of the church. The scene was set for an evening of saxophone music blending effectively with the human voice.

The soprano and alto saxophones, beautifully played by Naomi Sullivan, featured in many of the works, bringing new and interesting harmonies to some 16th and 17th century pieces by Orlando Gibbons and Thomas Tallis, and adding atmosphere and colour to contemporary works such as *O Wisdom* by Will Todd. Paul Mealor's piece for male voices *I saw eternity* had the saxophone blending in effectively with the voices, while wind chimes added an ethereal sound. Naomi also played arrangements of two flute pieces by J. S. Bach and C. P. E. Bach.

Many of the works with saxophone were arranged by the Yorkshire born saxophonist Christian Forshaw. They brought back memories of the now disbanded Hilliard Ensemble with their recordings of a cappella singing and improvised saxophone accompaniment.

Much of the programme involved quiet tones, but just before the interval we were treated to a sax solo entitledso *this is what happened* by Christoph Enzel - a loud, rousing, multiphonic piece, sounding like a whole band rather than just one instrument.

The concert also included soaring close harmonies in Cecilia McDowall's *The Lord is good* and Gail Randall's simpler setting of George Herbert's *The Call*. Herbert Howells *Requiem*, a relatively short reflective work, was performed with great attention to the speech rhythms and dynamics. The solo lines in this and other pieces in the programme were sung beautifully by different members of the choir and the saxophone blended well with the voices.

Susan Morris

Expect miracles from Epsom Choral Society

21 February 2024



Epsom Choral Society, renowned for its diverse and engaging programming, will be performing Mendelssohn's masterwork "Elijah" on Saturday, 18 November 2023 at 7:30pm at **St Martin's Church in Epsom**.



Prophet Elijah detailed in the Madonna and Child with Saints by Andrea di Bonaiuto

Under the baton of their music director **Julian Collings**, the performance will bring together a stellar cast of soloists, including soprano Elizabeth Findon, mezzo-soprano Judy Brown, tenor John Findon, and bass James Geidt. These outstanding vocalists will join forces with the Epsom Choral Society to transport audiences through the dramatic and uplifting narrative of Mendelssohn's powerful oratorio. There will be a special solo appearance by 14-year-old treble, **Brandon McGuinness**, a pupil at **Epsom College**.

A landmark in the choral-orchestral repertoire, "Elijah" is acclaimed for its vivid storytelling and emotional intensity, featuring grand choruses, captivating arias and thrilling ensembles.

Elijah was a prophet and a miracle worker who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Ahab (9th century BC). God performed many miracles through Elijah, including resurrection, bringing fire down from the sky, and entering heaven alive "by fire."

This performance promises to deliver a night of wonderful music, underlining Mendelssohn's genius for expressing profound spirituality and human emotion through music.

"We are delighted to present this enduring classic of the choral repertoire, conducted by Julian Collings and featuring an exceptional quartet of soloists. In Mendelssohn's dramatic setting of the story we will be evoking earthquake, wind and fire in what promises to be an unforgettable evening of music at St Martin's in the heart of Epsom." commented **Isobel Squire**, chair of Epsom Choral Society.

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

Tickets are available via the Epsom Choral Society website www.epsomchoral.org.uk or on the door on the night.

Epsom Choral Society is a community-based choral group with a rich history dating back to its formation in 1922. The society brings together music lovers from Epsom and the surrounding area, providing a platform for local talents to perform major choral works. The group is committed to fostering a love of music in the community and regularly collaborates with nationally and internationally acclaimed artists.

ECS puts on at least four concerts each year which attract a loyal following. Epsom Choral Society is a friendly choir - they do not require auditions but do aim for high performance standards. Rehearsals are on Wednesday evenings under the baton of their Musical Director, Julian Collings.

Related Reports

Elijah returns to Epsom before the end of times

Flyer

New home needed for disability theatre group

21 February 2024



A performing arts charity that won the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service has been made homeless after crumbly concrete was found in the hall it had called home for the past 17 years.

Freewheelers in Leatherhead is on the lookout for a new base - ideally one suitable for its disabled theatre and media company members.

On Tuesday, October 17, the group was forced out of its **Bridge Centre** base after the dangerous Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) which can collapse in an instant and without warning was discovered throughout the building’s roof.

For safety reasons, the building cannot be used nor accessed by any groups, according to **Surrey County Council**.

Posting to Facebook, the Freewheelers charity said: “We are homeless and sending out an SOS!

“Freewheelers are looking for a new home in or around Leatherhead. Do you know of an accessible space or spaces, suitable for our disabled theatre and media company members? We need spaces for dance, drama, film making and music on Mondays, Tuesdays and Friday mornings.”

“We are a diverse and creative company of people with disabilities based in Leatherhead, Surrey. We work alongside directors, producers, composers, artists and writers, to co-create and produce engaging, thought-provoking, funny, joyous and highly entertaining theatre, dance, film, and music.

For over thirty years we’ve been a force for change and artistic excellence in the world of Disability Arts.”

Freewheelers website.

Survey work is being carried out at the Clare Crescent site and Surrey County Council has confirmed that it is also actively helping the search for a new suitable location for the group while the centre is closed.

A spokesperson for the county council said: “We have been in constructive dialogue with the Freewheelers Theatre and Dance Company this week so that we fully understand their requirements. We are currently working at pace alongside Freewheelers to help find a suitable location for them to use while the Bridge Youth Centre is closed.”

They added: “The closure of the youth centre will allow further investigations to take place so that we can be assured the building is safe. We understand that the short notice closure of the Bridge Youth Centre may be challenging for groups that use the building and the residents they support. However, as residents would expect, safety is our top priority.”

Other groups who regularly use the Bridge Youth Centre have been offered temporary alternative accommodation, the council said adding that they were working to ensure anyone who may need to access equipment or items stored in the building will be able to do so safely.

They said “At present, as the discovery of RAAC in the building is very recent, we need to carry out further inquiries before we can provide any details on proposals to deal with the RAAC or timelines for re-opening.”

Image courtesy: Freewheelers

Chitty Chitty Bang Bang in Epsom

21 February 2024



Following a successful run of Little Shop of Horrors last November, **Leatherhead Opera Society** have been busy preparing for their next musical production, and it's a big one!

The title character in this show holds the record for the most expensive stage prop ever, and with "Chitty Hire" on board, this production certainly won't disappoint. This November, LOS proudly present a dazzling production of the beloved musical "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang" at the Epsom Playhouse. This amateur production is set to captivate the hearts of audiences young and old with its enchanting story, memorable tunes, and the sheer excitement of live theatre.

The musical, with a book by Jeremy Sans and music by Richard and Robert Sherman, is based on the classic 1968 film, which follows the adventures of the eccentric inventor Caractacus Potts (played in this production by Joe Black) as he rebuilds a magical car and sets off on a whirlwind journey with his children Jeremy and Jemima. They are joined along the way by Truly Scrumptious (played by Charlotte Fisher) and together they must outwit the villainous Baron & Baroness, as well as the evil Child-catcher - prepare to experience heart warming moments, daring escapades, and the power of imagination throughout!

The Leatherhead Operatic Society's cast and crew have been hard at work for the last few months under the watchful eye of director John Harries-Rees, and are perfecting this production with their talent, dedication and passion, which is sure to shine through in every performance. With musical direction from Sam Fisher, and choreography by Louise E. Wilson, this production features a talented ensemble of local actors, singers and dancers, all coming together to create a show that promises to be a 'fantasmagorical' treat for the whole family.

"Chitty Chitty Bang Bang" boasts a memorable score, with songs including "Truly Scrumptious," "Hushabye Mountain," and of course, the hugely popular "Me Ol' Bamboo". Audiences can expect top-notch musical performances that will have them humming the tunes long after the show has finished!

This production is a must-see for all ages, and the Epsom Playhouse is the perfect venue to bring this timeless tale to life. Don't miss this chance to experience the magic of "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang" with your friends and family. Tickets are on sale now and selling fast, so make sure to secure your seats early!

Performance Details:

Dates: November 21st - 25th, 2023

Venue: Epsom Playhouse, Ashley Avenue, Epsom, Surrey, KT18 5AL

Tickets can be purchased from www.epsomplayhouse.co.uk or by calling the Box Office on 01372 742555.

The Leatherhead Operatic Society started way back in 1904, and since then have staged hundreds of musicals old and new, including Beauty and the Beast, Hairspray, South Pacific, Oklahoma, My Fair Lady, Camelot, Guys and Dolls, Oliver, Fiddler on the Roof etc.

Image - Chitty Chitty Bang Bang in the Epsom Market Square