



Epsom & Ewell's French racing twin is a favourite

The Château de Chantilly has been selected as Monument Préféré des Français 2025 (France's Favourite Monument), surpassing 13 other iconic sites in a national vote. It succeeds the 24 Hours of Le Mans circuit, which won the honour in 2024.

This accolade was conferred through the popular France 3 television programme Le Monument Préféré des Français, presented by Stéphane Bern, which each year invites the public to vote for their favourite heritage site. Stéphane Bern is a well-known French journalist, television and radio presenter, writer and historian. He specialises in European history, royalty and cultural heritage, and is often described in France as the country's "Mr Heritage."

A heightened spotlight on Chantilly

Epsom and Ewell with Chantilly enjoy a twinning charter and both share a proud equestrian heritage. Chantilly is renowned for its racecourse and celebrated training grounds, Epsom is world-famous for the Derby, a race that has shaped the international thoroughbred calendar for over two centuries. This shared identity as centres of horseracing tradition provides a natural bond between the two towns and further enriches their twinning relationship.

The chateau victory not only amplifies the national and international profile of Chantilly but reinforces its status as an exceptional cultural treasure. The château, owned by the Institut de France, houses the Musée Condé, with the Duke of Aumale's art collection and library as its heart. It is also celebrated for its formal gardens, its expansive park and the remarkable Museum of the Horse, housed in the former great stables.

Since the château was designated "Monument préféré des Français," Stéphane Bern presented a commemorative plaque to Anne Miller, the château's administratrice générale. The French Ministry of Culture highlighted that this distinction honours not just architectural splendour, but the unique legacy bequeathed by the Duke of Aumale, reaffirming the château's role as a living site of art, memory and natural heritage.

The Duc d'Aumale: A link across the Channel

A key figure tying Chantilly to our locality is Henri, Duc d'Aumale (1822-1897), a French prince, military officer, scholar, bibliophile and art collector.

After the Revolution of 1848 forced the Orléans family into exile, the Duke of Aumale settled in Twickenham, just across the Thames from Epsom, in a notable residence known as Orleans House.

Although the main house was largely demolished in 1926, the Octagon Room and service wing survive as part of the Orleans House Gallery, now a Grade I listed building. During his stay, the Duke built an imposing library and picture gallery adjacent to Orleans House, housing many of his collections. These collections — including masterpieces by Raphael, Rubens and others — were later transferred back to Chantilly upon his death, forming a substantial part of the Musée Condé's holdings under his no-loans rule.

The Duke also had local ties through the birth of his son, François d'Orléans, duc de Guise, born in Twickenham in 1854. Upon his death in 1897, the Duke bequeathed Chantilly, together with its art, library and collections, to the Institut de France, under the condition that it be preserved as a museum of French art and history.

Twinning, cultural bridges, and local opportunity

The success of Chantilly in this national competition is a proud moment for Epsom & Ewell, reinforcing the value and impact of town-twinning. Twinning is not merely ceremonial — it offers opportunities for cultural exchange, reciprocal visits, shared projects in art, education and heritage, and deeper understanding between communities.

Nigel Collin, Chairman of the Epsom & Ewell Town-Twinning Association, commented:

"We warmly congratulate our colleagues in Chantilly for this well-deserved achievement. Anyone who has visited the Château cannot fail to be amazed, not just by its external splendour, but by the staggering depth of works from the 15th to the 19th century — works you can only see in situ here, thanks to the Duke of Aumale's strict no-loans condition. It really is well worth a visit, and if any residents are interested in visiting via a Twinning Association group, we will be pleased to advise and assist."

This announcement may inspire renewed interest in twinning visits, themed excursions focusing on heritage, art or gardens,



school exchanges, and collaborative cultural programmes. Epsom & Ewell welcomes ideas for reciprocal exchanges with Chantilly, whether joint exhibitions, lectures, or youth projects.

For further information or to register your interest in a Chantilly visit, please contact the Epsom & Ewell Twinning Association via contact@epsomtwinning.com.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Epsom's Milly to share spotlight with West End star Kerry Ellis

Local talent will step into the limelight at the Epsom Playhouse this Thursday, when Stagecoach Epsom student **Milly Playle** performs alongside one of Britain's most celebrated West End stars, **Kerry Ellis**, in the opening concert of Ellis's new UK tour.

Milly, who has already appeared in the West End production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and featured in several television commercials, was selected from hundreds of young hopefuls to join Ellis on stage. She has trained for years at Stagecoach Epsom in singing, dancing and acting, building the skills that have brought her to this special opportunity.

Adding a further Epsom connection, both Stagecoach Principal **Rachel** and Milly's mother, **Emma**, trained at Laine Theatre Arts - the same renowned performing arts college attended by Ellis before her career took flight.

Ellis is a household name in British theatre. She made her West End debut in *My Fair Lady* before achieving international fame as the original British lead in *Wicked*, playing Elphaba both in London and on Broadway. She has starred in *We Will Rock You*, *Oliver!*, *Les Misérables* and *Cats*, and is a long-time collaborator of Queen guitarist **Brian May**, with whom she has toured worldwide. Her acclaimed solo albums and sell-out concert tours have cemented her reputation as one of the UK's leading musical theatre performers.

The Playhouse concert is being staged by **Perform Ready Events**, which creates unique performance opportunities for young people across the country. At every stop on Ellis's tour, a young performer will share the stage - and for the first night, it is Epsom's very own Milly.

Rachel, Principal of Stagecoach Epsom, said:

"We are so proud of Milly and thrilled that she'll be representing Stagecoach Epsom on stage with such an incredible performer. It's a wonderful opportunity not only for her, but also for our community to celebrate local young talent."

Surrey to mark 50 years since the death of playwright R.C. Sherriff

This November marks the 50th anniversary of the death of **Robert Cedric Sherriff (1896-1975)**, the Surrey-born playwright and screenwriter best remembered for his First World War play *Journey's End*.

Sherriff, who attended Kingston Grammar School, originally worked as an insurance clerk before serving with distinction on the Western Front. His experiences in the trenches shaped *Journey's End* (1928), the searing drama set in a British officers' dugout during the last year of the war.



The play, which launched the career of a young Laurence Olivier – barely 21 at the time – was first staged at the Apollo Theatre in London. It became one of the defining anti-war works of its age and continues to be revived on stage and screen nearly a century later.

But Sherriff's talents extended far beyond the theatre. He went on to become the **highest-paid English scriptwriter in Hollywood**, penning screenplays for classics such as *The Invisible Man* (1933), *Goodbye Mr Chips* (1939), *The Four Feathers* (1939), and *The Dam Busters* (1955). His work combined dramatic structure with cinematic flair, leaving an enduring legacy on both sides of the Atlantic.

To mark the anniversary, **Surrey History Centre** is hosting a special event in Woking on **Saturday 8 November (10.30am-12.15pm)**. The programme includes:

- **Dr David Cottis - "RC Sherriff and the Well-Made Screenplay"**

A look at how Sherriff brought stagecraft into cinema, illustrated with material from the Centre's archives.

- **Roland Wales - "Shirkers or Spies? RC Sherriff in Wartime Hollywood"**

Exploring Sherriff's move to America during the Second World War, where British expatriates were accused in some quarters of being shirkers at home and even suspected spies abroad. Despite this, their patriotic films resonated strongly with American audiences, helping shape wartime morale.

The event will be held both **in person at the Surrey History Centre, Woking (130 Goldsworth Road, GU21 6ND)**, and online via Zoom. Tickets cost **£6** and must be booked in advance. Book [HERE](#)

For those interested in Surrey's literary heritage, the occasion provides a rare chance to revisit the remarkable career of a local man who made a global impact – from Kingston schoolboy to West End dramatist, Hollywood insider, and chronicler of the war generation.

For more news and events from Surrey History Centre [CLICK HERE](#)

Silver musical lines under a cloudless Epsom sky

On Sunday 10 August, under a radiant summer sky, the Epsom & Ewell Silver Band gave a free open-air concert in Rosebery Park. Families and friends gathered, bringing their own chairs or settling under marquees, enjoying ice creams, picnics, and the gentle warmth of the day. The relaxed, communal atmosphere felt quintessentially British—just the sort of setting the band seems to relish.

EESB competes in the First Section of the London & Southern Counties region, and is active within the Southern Counties Amateur Band Association (eesb.org.uk). Founded around 1910 as Banstead Silver Band, it has a rich heritage, including early rehearsal stories in barns and a legendary centenarian player, Tom Fiddimore, who helped sustain the band through decades. In July 2023, the experienced tenor-horn player and conductor Tariq Ahmed was appointed Musical Director. Originally from Lancashire, Tariq has an impressive background with championship bands and contest successes, including experience on BBC Radio 2, European tours, and national finals.

EESB's presentation was a masterclass in subtle harmonies and gorgeous arrangements. The ensemble gently wove together familiar melodies with rich brass textures.

The first half opened with San Lorenzo, a lyrical piece whose fluid lines invoked a serene Italian sunrise. Swingtime Religion brought a sprightly, jazz-tinged rhythm to the park. The Wichita Lineman was delivered with poignant phrasing, capturing the emotional core of Jimmy Webb's classic. In Concerto de Aranjuez, the Adagio's romantic guitar theme, eloquently rendered by brass, floated beautifully amid the greenery. The Spirit Within, a more modern piece imbued with introspection and warmth. Bui Doi carried a haunting quality, resonating with depth, while St Louis Blues March blended bluesy soul with marching energy. Let's Face the Music and Dance, the Irving Berlin standard, swung with effortless charm to close the half.

The second half began with Florentiner March, bright and ceremonial, restoring lively momentum. Ae Fond Kiss, Robert Burns' tender farewell, was exquisitely phrased. Salute to Sinatra offered a glitzy, nostalgic trip back to the Rat Pack era. With One Look from the musical Sunset Boulevard was dramatic and expressive, the brass almost singing the lyrics. Pinball Wizard brought energy and edge, while Song of the Night Sky was dreamy and atmospheric, ideal for a summer evening. Pastime with Good



Company nodded to Elizabethan merriment, and the finale, You Can't Stop the Beat, soared energetically to bring the concert to a rousing close.

This concert showcased the band's mastery of nuance, from classical depth to modern zest, with arrangements that highlighted every section in balanced harmony. On a sunny August afternoon, amid picnics and cheerful chatter, the Epsom & Ewell Silver Band underlined its role not just as a brass ensemble, but as a focal point of community culture and joyful musical experience.

Thanks to Cllr Steven McCormick (RA Surrey and Woodcote and Langley) for arranging and the photo.

Ewell's Nescot student's work selected for Origins Creatives 2025

Art & Design student from Nescot College, Imaani Zafar, has been selected to exhibit her work at Origins Creatives, taking place at the Mall Galleries in July.

Imaani's submission, titled, 'Mother Nature: The Voice of Amazigh Women Through Textile', explores the idea of civilisation and caught the attention of UAL (University of the Arts London) Awarding Body's curator, Calum Hall, amongst over 600 submissions.

Speaking about her work, Imaani, who has completed the first year of her UAL Level Three Extended Diploma said, "I made this installation to educate people about the Amazigh women. Their knowledge and practices are often overlooked, and I wanted to create something to honour their existence."

Sarah Morgan, Art and Digital Design lecturer at Nescot commented, "We are all so proud of Imaani. Her creation demonstrates her artistic voice with meaning and sentiment. We are thrilled that her work has been selected by UAL Awarding Body for Origins Creatives at the prestigious Mall Galleries. It is a fantastic opportunity for Imaani to showcase her work at this annual celebration of student achievement, connect with peers, industry experts and the public."

Origins Creatives is a free exhibition presented by UAL Awarding Body, offering an exciting opportunity for art enthusiasts, critics, and industry professionals in the creative sector to discover fresh, original talent. This event celebrates the dedication and hard work of young creatives from across the UK and internationally. Origins Creatives provides a platform for emerging talent to be seen and celebrated, connecting them with potential collaborators, industry leaders, and a wider audience.

The exhibition features outstanding work from students based across the UAL centres showcasing their talent across the UAL subject areas of Art and Design, Fashion Business and Retail, Creative Media, Music Performance and Production, Performing Arts, Entry Level 3 in Art and Design and Performing Arts, Professional Diplomas, and the Extended Project Qualification.

This year's edition of Origins Creatives will take place in person at the Mall Galleries in central London. The exhibition kicks off with an invite-only opening night on Tuesday 15 July. It will be open to the public from 16 - 19 July, alongside an online showcase.

The exhibition will showcase selected work created by students from Entry Level and Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 across all subject areas. You can expect to see a diverse range of painting, photography, drawing, sculpture, fashion and more.

Exhibition opening times for the public:

- Wednesday 16 July, 10am - 6pm
- Thursday 17 July, 1pm - 6pm
- Friday 18 July, 10am - 6pm
- Saturday 19 July, 10am - 5pm

Address: Mall Galleries, The Mall, St. James's, London SW1Y 5AS

If you are interested in attending this event, please book your ticket at: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/origins-creatives-2025-tickets-1345097014379?aff=oddtcreator>

In addition to the range of Art and Digital Design UAL Awarding Body courses, Nescot offers a wide range of college courses for school leavers and adults, including Animal Care, Business, Computing and IT, Construction, Performing Arts, Childcare, Health & Social Care and Beauty Therapy. To find out more about studying at Nescot call 020 8394 3038, visit www.nescot.ac.uk or



email adviceteam@nescot.ac.uk

Nescot student Imaani Zafar's art installation_Origins Creatives 2025_2

Epsom choir range in all musical directions

On Saturday 28th June, the Epsom Chamber Choir presented an eclectic programme of music inspired by Shakespeare's songs and sonnets. Ranging from small-scale madrigals to the beautiful melodies of Bernstein's *West Side Story*, relaxed jazz from George Shearing, and an uplifting setting of Whitacre's *Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine*, with everything in between, there truly was music for everyone.

Encouraged by the generous acoustics of St Martin's Church, Epsom, the choir was in good voice despite the heat of the evening. The programme structure combined more contemporary music interspersed with madrigals (sung mainly two to a part), giving most of the choir an opportunity to shine. While some of the small groups were more successful in mastering the "art" of the madrigal—especially in the performance of *Fair Phyllis*—this music nevertheless offered both vocal and musical contrast.

The *West Side Story* medley (along with the arrangement of *Summertime*) provided a joyous start to the concert, with excellent choir diction and lovely solo singing. The four Shakespeare songs by the Finnish composer Jaakko Mäntyjärvi (born 1963) were more challenging for both the audience and the choir. Requiring an exceptionally high standard of performance, the choir, as always, was assured, although tuning and balance suffered a little at times.

In contrast, the performance of Whitacre's *Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine* was masterful—sung with conviction, passion, and finesse. Bravo, Epsom Chamber Choir!

The second half had a lighter feel, with some meaningful arrangements, including Billy Joel's *And So It Goes* (arranged by Bob Chilcott), all of which were sung beautifully. The concert concluded with the five *Songs and Sonnets from Shakespeare* by George Shearing, which gave the choir a chance to "let their hair down." Clearly, they enjoyed these pieces, as did the audience, supported by excellent piano accompaniment from Stephen Ridge.

For this concert, Tristan Weymes replaced ECC's principal conductor, Jack Apperley, and his calm and sensitive approach was appreciated by all.

Congratulations to the Epsom Chamber Choir for a joyous summer evening of Shakespeare-inspired music.

So, "if music be the food of love, sing on!"

—Michael Stevenson MA FTCL GTCL ARCO

Photo credit Paul McCan

The Royal Marines Band Collingwood at Epsom Playhouse

Organised by Cllr **Dr Graham Jones** MBE (Lieutenant Colonel (retired) (RA Cuddington) the renowned **Royal Marines Band Collingwood** made a triumphant performance at the Epsom Playhouse on Friday night, delivering a rousing programme brimming with technical excellence, military precision, and heartfelt artistry. Conducted by Captain Phil Trudgeon and Warrant Officer 2 Bandmaster Jamie Gunn, the band captivated a near-capacity audience with a thrilling showcase of traditional military repertoire and popular favourites.

The evening began, fittingly, with the National Anthem performed with stately dignity, reflecting the band's deep roots in national and royal service.

The opening item, **Overture to *Candide* by Leonard Bernstein**, displayed infectious energy and fizzing orchestration, setting a vibrant tone. Bernstein's much-loved operetta is famed for its satirical bite, and the Marines captured its brilliance and wit with panache.



Next came John Philip Sousa's **Who's Who in Navy Blue**, a 1920 march celebrating American naval traditions, crisply articulated by the brass and percussion with authentic verve.

In a change of mood, the band shifted to the familiar strains of the **Top Gun Theme**, arranged by Laughton. Its soaring harmonies and stirring sense of adventure delighted the audience, showcasing the band's ability to cross genres effortlessly.

The **Drum Static** interlude then brought the spotlight to the Corps of Drums. Their razor-sharp discipline, complex sticking patterns and synchronised movement brought rapturous applause.

Cape Helles by Young followed, a poignant musical tribute to the Gallipoli landings of 1915, performed with great sensitivity and power.

Alford's lively **The Mad Major** quick march injected a welcome spark of lightness, its playful melody and military swagger a reminder of Alford's enduring legacy as the "British March King."

A show-stopping highlight came with Corporal Savage's clarinet solo in **Artie Shaw's Clarinet Concerto**, arranged by Cray. This 1940 swing-inspired concerto, with its swooping glissandi and jazz idioms, was delivered with aplomb and won a spontaneous ovation.

The first half concluded with two contrasting works. **In Ireland** by Lance Corporal Brooks explored traditional folk-tinged melodies with a fresh, lyrical approach. Finally, Frank Ticheli's **Vesuvius** erupted with rhythmic fire and dramatic textures, a thrilling depiction of the famous volcano's destructive power.

The second half began with **Maiden Legacy**, an arrangement by Captain Trudgeon, demonstrating the band's ability to reinterpret newer repertoire with flair.

A stylish rendition of **Skyfall**, the James Bond theme popularised by Adele with band soloist Beth McGregor, delivered a rich, cinematic grandeur which clearly resonated with the audience.

For the finale, the band turned to a cornerstone of English wind music: Gustav Holst's **A Moorside Suite**, originally written for brass band.

- The **Scherzo** sparkled with rhythmic energy,
- The **Nocturne** brought a serene, pastoral calm,
- And the concluding **March** was robust and dignified, the perfect platform for the band's tonal power and ensemble unity.

Shenandoah, arranged by Frank Ticheli, offered a moving moment of reflection. This classic American folk tune, thought to date back to early 19th-century river boatmen, was performed with deep feeling and a sonorous blend. Played in memory of a young member of the band recently lost to motor neurone disease.

As dusk approached, the band performed the traditional **Sunset**, arranged by Green, a moment of quiet remembrance often associated with evening ceremonies in the Royal Navy.

The concert then closed with two of the Royal Marines' most cherished musical emblems: **Heart of Oak**, the official march of the Royal Navy since the 18th century, and **A Life on the Ocean Wave**, the Royal Marines' regimental march, based on Henry Russell's 19th-century song. These stirring finales underlined the band's powerful heritage and left the audience in no doubt of their world-class standing.

However, the audience would not let them go without an encore and with Eric Coates' great Dambusters March all left satisfied.

The Royal Marines Band Service has maintained its traditions since the 18th century, combining musical excellence with operational service. The Band Collingwood, based at HMS Collingwood, continues to support Royal Navy and national ceremonial events across the UK and internationally. Its members are trained both as musicians and as deployable service personnel, maintaining a dual role unmatched in the military music world.

The evening was also attended by members of the local branch of the Royal British Legion (RBL), who noted in the programme that concerts like these are an enduring link between the public and the Armed Forces, highlighting the shared remembrance and respect for those who have served.

This concert was a brilliant reminder of the pride, tradition, and sheer artistry of the Royal Marines Band Collingwood, whose



excellence lifted the hearts of all who were privileged to hear them.

Well done to Dr Graham Jones for bringing such a memorable evening to Epsom.

Image courtesy Steven McCormick Photography

Epsom Picturehouse blossoms with Pride

Picturehouse Epsom is proud to announce a powerful new partnership with Blossom LGBT to launch OUT — a year-round celebration of LGBTQ+ cinema.

Together, we're amplifying queer voices on screen and creating space for connection, reflection, and community — showing that Pride isn't just a once-a-year event, but an ongoing conversation and opportunity to build lasting community.

About Blossom LGBT

Blossom LGBT is a national non-profit supporting LGBTQIA+ young adults aged 16-30. Based in Surrey, their mission is to ensure that no young person faces exclusion — social or economic — because of who they are or whom they love.

They work to break down systemic barriers of discrimination, poverty, and disadvantage, empowering the next generation to thrive.

At Blossom, we are dedicated to creating a world where LGBTQIA+ young adults can overcome discrimination, thrive in safe and supportive communities, and access the tools and opportunities needed to succeed with dignity and purpose. We are designed for the community, by the community.

It's vital that young people see themselves reflected in film, not just to feel visible, but to know that their stories, identities, and futures matter. Representation can inspire confidence, spark ambition, and help young people imagine a world where they belong.

Our Venue: Epsom Picturehouse

Epsom Picturehouse is a brand-new six-screen cinema in the heart of Epsom Square. With a rich programme of arthouse and quality mainstream films, plus a stylish café and bar, it offers a perfect setting for inclusive, community-focused events.

We're excited to open our doors to OUT and host a variety of screenings, discussions, and gatherings that celebrate the richness and diversity of LGBTQ+ lives and experiences.

Joe Stroud from Epsom Picturehouse said:

"I'm delighted that, at the heart of all this, we're celebrating community. What better way to do that than by sharing powerful stories on screen and using them as inspiring conversation starters?"

What is OUT?

OUT is a long-running Picturehouse initiative that celebrates LGBTQ+ stories — from reclaimed classics to bold new voices. Now in its tenth year at Clapham Picturehouse, we're thrilled to extend this initiative to Surrey, helping local audiences build connections and community through film.

Clapham's OUT journey began in 2014 with a screening of *Dallas Buyers Club*, and has since included landmark titles such as Barry Jenkins' *Moonlight*, the historic Best Picture winner at the 2017 Academy Awards. Now, it's Epsom's turn.

Upcoming Events: Brokeback Mountain + Q&A Panel — 6 July

Join Blossom LGBT for a special 20th anniversary screening of *Brokeback Mountain*, directed by Ang Lee and starring Heath



Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal — a landmark film for the LGBTQ+ community.

Following the screening, we'll host an open and thoughtful Q&A with invited panellists, exploring the film's emotional journey — touching on themes of love, repression, and resilience.

Together, we'll reflect on how life for LGBTQ+ people has changed (and in some ways stayed the same), especially in rural communities. How do those experiences echo in today's legal battles and cultural conversations?

The evening will feature invited guests, including Outline, an organisation supporting people with their sexuality and gender identity through a helpline, website, and support groups. Also attending are the Mary Frances Trust (MFT) LGBT Peer Support Group, as well as Walk and Talk 4 Men — a free support group for men to come together, walk, talk, and support their mental health while enjoying some fresh air.

This event is for anyone seeking connection — whether you're exploring your own journey, supporting someone close to you, or simply curious to learn more. We invite you into a warm, inclusive space to listen, reflect, and be part of a growing community.

Mark your calendars for more upcoming events celebrating LGBTQ+ stories:

Sun 29 Jun

- reDiscover *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (15) at 17:10

Mon 30 Jun

- Out Queer Futures (Cert TBC) at 20:30
- reDiscover *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (15) at 19:45

Tue 01 Jul

- Discover — Preview *Hot Milk* (15) at 20:15

Wed 02 Jul

- *Brokeback Mountain* plus Q&A (15) at 18:30

Stay tuned for more film nights, conversations, and creative community events throughout the year. Whether you're a long-time advocate or new to the conversation, there's a seat here for you.

Let's make Pride more than a moment — let's make it a movement. See you at the cinema.

For more information about the organisers, visit blossom.lgbt or email Steph Elhaddad at Steph.Elhaddad@blossom.lgbt.

Epsom Choral Society ends term on a high note

21st June, St Andrews, Northey Avenue: Fresh from their triumph at this year's Leith Hill Music Festival, Epsom Choral Society presented an end-of-term programme consisting of three wonderful contemporary items on a theme of jazz and improvisation. Plus a fourth - which earned its place by virtue of being a world premiere! The whole evening worked like a giant crescendo, starting quietly and ending with Will Todd's magnificent and sometimes wild *Mass in Blue*.

Jazz as a genre poses huge demands on a traditional choir. It's no longer enough just to master the notes, the rhythms and the dynamics. The whole concept of flexible swing rhythms can feel positively alien to those steeped in classical music. Full marks, therefore, to ECS conductor Julian Collings, for helping the choir to overcome what is, in essence, a new language to give us an evening of singing that was convincing, exuberant and full of vitality.

Hats off also to the supporting cast: saxophonist Alex Flower, bassist Ben Summers, drummer Tom Lee and pianist Peter Jaekel. Ultimate accolade must go to soprano Lisa Swayne for her stratospheric ululations that took *Mass in Blue* to a different level.

Opening the concert was Ola Gjeilo's (1978-) *Evening Prayer*. Gjeilo's reflective, not necessarily religious, compositions with



sumptuous harmonies have made him a great favourite with choirs on both sides of the Atlantic. Composed in 2010, the powerful words of St Augustine were reverently and warmly sung, with all three protagonists – choir, pianist and saxophonist – creating an atmosphere of contemplation within a framework of gentle and optional improvisation.

And thus, having been transported heavenwards, we were brought down to earth with a bump!

This fun little ditty *True Story* (words by Michael Rosen) was one of a song-set of ten by Russell Hepplewhite, who conceived of inviting ten living poets to document his/her personal response to the current world, and setting these to music. It's not clear whether the full set is ever intended to be performed all together, since they are being individually premiered this year by choirs from around the country.

The song chosen for ECS is set very simply for choir and piano – which makes it accessible for many choirs. Excellent diction was vital to the storytelling; along with a spirited enjoyment of the text – where one man's ecstasy at the birth of his son is mirrored against another man's wonderment at the hatching of a pigeon's egg.

The John Rutter (1945–) of the *Birthday Madrigals* is a totally different Rutter from the one of popular Christmas carols. These songs are settings of Elizabethan texts infused with the spirit of jazz, whilst perpetuating the great tradition of English part songs. That Rutter is capable of this level of technical mastery of the jazz idiom, together with his lightness of touch and superb invention, makes for a set of five miniatures indispensable to the choral anthology.

And ECS rose to the challenges, giving us an impressive array of singing – from the nimble, joyful and carefree to soulful blending of voices; from fearless high spirits to judicious balancing of the ladies' long, lyrical phrases against harmonious humming from the gentlemen. Optional piano accompaniment in the a cappella numbers provided subtle support for tricky shifting harmonies. What a treat to take us to the interval!

Ever since the 10th century if not before, man has made music to glorify his gods – from the monks' Gregorian chants to the masses of Haydn and Beethoven, each reflecting the conventions of their time. In 1991, Paco Peña created a fiery and rumbustious *Misa Flamenca* to celebrate the Almighty. So it seems appropriate, inevitable even, that in 2003, Will Todd (1970–) should decide to make use of a contemporary idiom to fashion his own offering.

Mass in Blue needs small but vital supporting resources – soprano solo, piano, bass, saxophone, drum kit. But smallness in scale does not mean smallness in achievements. Quite the contrary. What shines through is a superbly confident writing technique that is strong, clear, propulsive and above all, enjoyable for both singers and listeners alike.

No one should under-estimate the amount of hard work that the choir must have put in to meet the merciless technical challenges. There are sliding intricacies of jazzy rhythms, seemingly indecipherable within the confines of traditional notation; there are rapid changes of tempi, metre, dynamics and everything else going; there is the uber-cool, quasi-fugal and multi-layered *Benedictus* – all of these demanding agile and committed singing to maintain the driving momentum. Members of ECS embraced all these hurdles and more, and with the return of the mighty soprano adding fire to the quadraphonic build-up to a bone-shakingly thrilling finale.

Yes, we were gripped. All of us.

Job done. BRAVISSIMO!

Lynda Chang is a local musician and advocate of live music

Image: Mass in Blue – Lisa Swayne and Julian Collings

Mental Health and Justice in Special Epsom Film Screening

A powerful evening of film and conversation is coming to Epsom Picturehouse on Monday 23 June, as local mental health charity *Mary Frances Trust* teams up with national organisation *Women in Prison* to present a special screening of the acclaimed documentary *HOLLOWAY*.

The event, beginning at 7.30pm, will include a live Q&A with guest speakers exploring the intersection of trauma, mental health,



and the women's prison system — themes at the heart of both the film and the work of Mary Frances Trust.

Directed by BAFTA Breakthrough Brit Daisy-May Hudson and Emmy-nominated filmmaker Sophie Compton, *HOLLOWAY* invites six women back to the now-closed Holloway Prison, where they form a women's circle to share deeply personal stories of incarceration and survival. The result is a compelling portrait of systemic failure and personal transformation, as the women trace the roots of their journeys through trauma and into healing.

Created through a trauma-informed, co-creative process, the film features contributions from Aliyah Ali, Mandy Ogunmokun, Sarah Cassidy, Lady Unchained, Gerrah, and Tamar Mujanay. It won the Audience Award at the BFI London Film Festival and has prompted vital discussions wherever it has been shown.

Following the screening, audience members will hear from a panel of guest speakers:

- **Karryn Robinson**, London Prison Services Manager at *Women in Prison*, who leads the Unsentenced Women project at Bronzefield Prison. Karryn has previously worked as a trauma specialist counsellor, Crisis Team Manager at MIND, and as a domestic abuse advocate within the Probation Service.
- **Megan Siarey**, Delivery and Strategy Lead for Co-Production and Community Engagement at *Mary Frances Trust*.
- **Sophie Compton**, Emmy, Grierson and BIFA-nominated director of *HOLLOWAY* and *Another Body*.

The evening promises to be a moving and enlightening experience for anyone interested in mental health, justice reform, and the power of community-led support.

Event details

Epsom Picturehouse

Monday 23 June, 7.30pm

Tickets available at: picturehouses.com

Watch the trailer and find more details via Mary Frances Trust:

<https://www.maryfrancestrust.org.uk/mft-co-hosts-special-screening-qa-holloway-at-epsom-picturehouse/>

Image: Contributor Mandy opens up about her early childhood trauma during the women's circle. Six women who had been imprisoned in Holloway Prison took part in the women's circle over 5 days, returning to the now-closed Holloway Prison to tell their stories.