### **Little Solemn Mass**

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 Tunnicliffe (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

## Lavish production of Elijah reviewed

**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**.

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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

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 Komyshan**, 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  ${\bf Lionel~Blackman}$  at epsommusicsoc@gmail.com

### **New Conductor - New Sounds**

**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 entitled ....so 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**

**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

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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

# Guildford centre of the cosmos for a day

Budding astronauts and space engineers are set to be wowed and inspired on Saturday 7 October, when space researchers at the University of Surrey take over Guildford town centre.

The University and its event partners, the Institute of Physics, will offer activities for children and adults to try in the Tunsgate Centre and on the High Street.

Thanks to the UK Space Agency, there will be space suits to try on, Winchester Science Centre will host a pop-up planetarium, and there'll be a working model of a mini Mars rover.

Experts from Surrey Space Centre will be in the Tunsgate Centre.

Laura Cox from the University of Surrey's Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences explained what people can see. She said:

"Come along to see inside a small satellite and have a go at steering it. You can also help spot illegal fishing boats on satellite images, a crime which costs over \$15bn annually.

"At the mobile ground station, visitors can see signals from satellites in real-time and the decoded data they are sending from space. And you can learn about different types of space rocks and handle 3D-printed models of real asteroids, comets, and planetary moons."

Astrophysicists from the School of Mathematics and Physics will be answering astronomy questions, running a constellation activity, offering an escape room-style activity and more.

Local employers in the space sector will also participate, including Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd (SSTL), who will show off models of spacecraft and components of the satellites they make, including a propulsion tank, circuit boards and samples of the exterior panels we see in photos.

Dr Nicola Baresi, an astrodynamicist who plans efficient routes for spacecraft to travel in space, including to the Moon and to other planets in our solar system, says:

"It's going to be a fun day for people of all ages with lots of space-related activities and experiments to try. Space is a hugely exciting sector and is a thriving industry across Surrey and Hampshire. There are plenty of opportunities for rewarding careers in this area, yet significant skills shortages, something we help tackle at the University of Surrey with our research activities and educational programmes. We're keen to inspire people and help them realise that they could get a job in the space industry."

## Elijah returns to Epsom before the end of times

On Wednesday 20th September, **Epsom Choral Society** held an open rehearsal at **St Martin's Church**, **Epsom**, their usual concert venue. An 'open rehearsal' served a double purpose. It was part of the preparation for their concert, performing **Felix Mendelssohn's** *Elijah* **on 18th November**. It was also a bid to attract some new singing members by offering a chance to come and try it out.

I went along. I enjoy Mendelssohn's music and it is easier to appreciate after an attempt at performing it. As Wednesday's weather approached biblical proportions, it was a good night for singing about whirlwinds droughts and floods.

After a welcome from choir chairman **Isobel Squire**, conductor **Julian Collings** began the rehearsal. The whole work has about 40 songs. The choir sings in about half of them. Usually, a rehearsal would entail concentrating on a few items, looking to correct some mistakes, find the music among the notes and then sing each piece all the way through. Wednesday was more of a taster. We sang fairly quickly through almost all the choral numbers, saving the detailed work for Julian's favourite movement, 'He, watching over Israel'. The conductor's role is to know the music inside-out (he does!), warning which notes are likely to go wrong and suggesting ways to make them sound better. Once the notes are correct, the next stage is suggesting how to shape them to bring out the musical effects.

No-one has to sing alone. Epsom Choral Society has room for some new members but they do have all parts covered. There are confident singers among sopranos, altos, tenors and basses. Any newcomer will be adding to the overall sound, not sticking out while searching for the notes. They also have an expert pianist, **Marion Lea**, who can highlight the choir parts while learning or pretend to be an orchestra when everyone is singing something through.

Although the open rehearsal has passed, there are still plenty of Wednesdays before the concert. If you fancy a chance to discover *Elijah* from within an able and welcoming choir, I'm sure Epsom Choral Society's membership secretary (membership@epsomchoralsociety.org.uk) will be very happy to hear from you.

Nigel Williams.

## New art fair comes to Epsom

A new contemporary art fair is coming to The Duchess Stand, Epsom Downs Racecourse, 6 - 8 October 2023.

**Art Surrey** opens on Friday 6th October with a Preview Evening and a complimentary glass of fizz from 6pm to 9pm and opens over the weekend on Saturday 7 October 10am-6pm and Sunday 8 October 10am-5pm.

This inaugural art fair, curated by Art Surrey and **Ewell** based Art Adviser and Gallery, **Caiger Art**, offers art lovers and collectors the chance to browse and purchase artworks from over 80 of the most exciting contemporary and traditional artists selling today, many of whom are Surrey based artists.

As final preparations get under way, Carol Caiger, Director of Art Surrey, is understandably very excited about this new Epsom venture, "Being one of the largest art fairs within the south east of England, this new contemporary art fair will the perfect place to find artwork to start your art collection, or add to your collection if you are already an art enthusiast!"

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There will be over 3000 works of art to see, paintings, drawings, prints, digital art, mixed media art, photography, sculpture, glassworks and ceramics. With all artwork ranging from £50 to over £3000, there will be something for everyone.

This year the invited showcase is Surrey Sculpture Society, who will be showing a selection of their artists sculptures for sale.

Carol Caiger adds, "The bonus is, as well as awesome artwork, the Caiger Art and Art Surrey Team are on hand to give expert advice on the best artwork to buy for your home, too."

Weekend facilities include a bar and café serving teas, coffee and food throughout Saturday and Sunday, so you can easily spend a whole day there! The venue has ample onsite parking and is wheelchair accessible.

You can have see the limited edition art fair brochure here: https://artsurrey.co.uk/brochure-2023/.

Tickets are available to buy for the Friday Preview Evening, Saturday and Sunday from https://artsurrey.co.uk/tickets/

## World class live-jazz returns to Epsom

Epsom Jazz Club returns this Tuesday 12th September for another three highly anticipated world class jazz concerts, beginning with their first intimate duo show.

The wondrous pair of Cuban Jazz violinist **Omar Puente** and Italian pianist and composer **Ilario Ferrari** have performed their "**Mediterranean meets Cuba**" show numerous times in London to sellout crowds and now Epsom Jazz Club has encouraged them to bring it to our Borough to launch the new Season. Omar can often be seen leading his own sextet in venues such as Ronnie Scott's and upon many a Jazz Festival stage. Ilario is equally busy, having just released his third album as band leader, a work for piano and string quartet that combines Classical music, contemporary Jazz and Indian rhythms. They promise to take the audience on a journey from Cuba, the shores of south Italy and back, exploring the common ground and new possibilities that come from the encounter of the Afro-Cuban Jazz tradition and the Mediterranean Culture.

Next month, on Tuesday 10th October Epsom Jazz Club plays host to an all-star Saxophone Quartet led by swing and the straight-ahead focussed **Fraser Smith**. In-demand pianist **Rob Barron** makes his return to Epsom after his visit in August (with vibes player Nat Steele), alongside revered bassist **Simon Read** and stalwart jazz drummer **Steve Brown**. Swinging sax quartets are often so popular with audiences and these four musicians are amongst the best. Following Fraser's album release in April this year, the band has been gigging all over the UK showcasing much of the music from "TipTop!" as well as hard bop / bebop arrangements of popular standards.

And finally, on Tuesday 7th November arguably one of the world's best jazz clarinettists, **Giacomo Smith**, will be performing on the Oaks Room stage. Born in Italy and raised in upstate New York, Giacomo leads many great projects (including Kansas Smitty's, Hot Five, Trav'lin Light) as well as being in demand all over the world as a soloist and collaborator. He's produced recordings for Jamie Cullum, rising star Jas Kayser and the debut album from actor Damian Lewis alongside performing regularly as a featured soloist with Gregory Porter the Southbank Sinfonia and other international orchestras. His writing, production and collaborations have garnered 10m + streams and counting. Alongside New Zealand born jazz guitarist and banjo player **Alexander 'Honey' Boulton**, and US born (and Manhattan School of Music and Royal Academy of Music graduate) double bassist **Will Sach**, Epsom Jazz Club has booked a phenomenal trio for their Autumn Season finale!

Tickets for all these concerts are on sale now and available to buy in advance either via their website **EpsomJazzClub.com** or by going directly to the **ticket site**.

http://twitter.com/EpsomJazzClub

http://facebook.com/EpsomJazzClub

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# Epsom's outdoor theatre going great guns

On Monday 31st July we went to see **Annie Get Your Gun** at the **Lavender Theatre** – a recently erected outdoor space amongst lavender fields in Reigate Road, Epsom. A new venture for Mayfield Lavender.. the owners of the family-run lavender farm in Banstead. Fortunately, it was a lovely evening and the setting perfect. We were welcomed into the theatre after passing through the stunning shop with beautiful gifts including 'lavender chocolate bars' – outside one could buy drinks and enjoy delicious eats before the performance.

The show included celebrated stars from the music world – SuRie (represented the United Kingdom in the Eurovision Song concert in 2018) as Anna, Charlie Mccullagh (Frank) and many other wonderful performers including three children.

We were enthralled by the magic of this open-air show, tapping our feet to the famous tunes including "no business like show business" and 'Doin' what comes natur'lly'.

I can honestly say it was one of our best evenings out! Huge congratulations to Director Simon Hardwick and his team.

Tickets are still available until the show ends on Saturday 5th August!

On sale today at lavendertheatre.com.

As locals we hope that this innovative exciting venture will continue - another jewel for our area.

Related reports:

New Epsom theatre very open for business