



Surrey author's unexpected journey to global football goodwill

If you had asked Surrey-based accidental author Stephen Johnson twenty years ago whether he would one day write a ten-book children's series, sponsor a grassroots football kit in East London, and end up backing a trophy for "the worst team in the world" in Micronesia, he says he would have laughed. Yet life, he reflects, has a habit of surprising you.

Johnson, who has lived in the Epsom & Ewell area for many years, says the whole adventure began almost by accident, from the writing to the football involvement. His children's picture-book series *Berry Town* did not begin with a long-held dream but with a workplace bet. "I'd been telling a colleague that anyone can achieve anything with enough persistence," he recalls. "He challenged me to write a book. I told him books take years, so he said, 'Fine, write a children's book.' Challenge accepted."

The idea took shape around characters inspired by fruit. Years earlier, Johnson had pitched a fruit-based TV concept that was dismissed on the grounds that "kids aren't interested in fruit", but the idea stuck with him. When the challenge arrived, he created the *Berry Town* community, beginning with Mrs Straw, a character he describes as having "very Hyacinth Bucket vibes". Illustrator David Leonard joined after Johnson scoured the internet for artists willing to take on the unusual brief with a modest budget. "David just got it," he says. "My sketches needed rescuing, and his flat, colourful artwork brought the whole world alive."

There were some early hiccups, including a character name that had to be changed after a reviewer pointed out an unfortunate slang meaning. "That one needed fixing straight away," Johnson admits. "You never forget moments like that."

Before *Berry Town* ever reached Micronesia, it first made its mark in East London. In 2009, Johnson sponsored a full kit for Senrab FC, a grassroots club renowned for producing future Premier League players. The shirts featured bespoke artwork of two *Berry Town* characters, the Boysen Twins. "I was doing well at the time and wanted to give back," he says. "Helping kids felt right." Many of the young players still remember "the *Berry Town* kit", and several were given copies of the books — one child telling him it was the first book they had ever owned. "If you can support kids in football and in reading, you do it," Johnson says.

But the most surprising chapter unfolded 7,000 miles away in Pohnpei, Micronesia. Johnson came across an article about two British men, Paul Watson and Matt Conrad, who travelled there to coach what was widely considered the worst football team in the world. "I loved their ambition," he says. "I contacted them and asked if I could help."

He ended up sponsoring the *Berry Town* Cup — awarded to the runners-up of the Pohnpei Premier League. The main trophy had already been sponsored, so he took the next one available. Only later did he realise the league was often improvised, with teams struggling to assemble due to travel costs. "But none of that mattered. I just wanted to help," he says. He also sent copies of the books to local schools, where they became unexpected resources for children learning English.

More than a decade later, Johnson rediscovered the original artwork, drafts, and even the formal sponsorship certificate tucked away on an old computer. "It was labelled 'Old Projects, *Berry Town*'," he says. "I opened it all up and smiled. I'd forgotten how much heart went into it." Sharing the story with his football-mad 13-year-old son brought new joy. "He loved it," Johnson says. "He started researching Pohnpei, asking questions. It became this lovely bonding moment."

Although Johnson believes *Berry Town* "has had its time", he is considering releasing the books digitally, probably for free. "Why not let the world enjoy them?" he says.

What began as a playful dare became a decade-spanning adventure involving creativity, kindness, international football, and a legacy that travelled far further than its author could ever have imagined.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Photo: International FC, being awarded the *Berry-Town.com* Pohnpei Premier League Runners-Up Cup



Epsom's Young Performers Light Up Picturehouse Showcase

It was an unusually busy Sunday morning at Epsom's Picturehouse, with the main cinema hall filled to the very last seat. It is rare to see it so full at that time of day. Jamie Bannerman, principal of PQA Epsom, moved around with calm efficiency, directing guests, helping young performers find their places and ensuring the event ran smoothly. The screening was completely sold out, and for good reason.

PQA - the Pauline Quirke Academy of Performing Arts - is a nationwide academy for children and teenagers aged 4 to 18. With more than 200 academies operating across the country on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, PQA offers young people a creative and supportive space to learn acting, singing, dancing, filmmaking and more. Around 200 students attend weekly classes in Epsom, developing not only performance skills but also confidence, imagination and teamwork.

The showcase at Picturehouse demonstrated just how transformative these experiences can be. The audience enjoyed an inspiring mix of short films, from musical tributes and Shakespeare recitations by remarkably young performers to socially aware pieces exploring video-game culture, comedy sketches and musical-inspired dance routines. Each film reflected the students' creativity, commitment and growing self-belief.

The academy plans to stage a musical next season, so families whose children have ever shown an interest in performing may find this the perfect moment to get involved.

PQA's motto, "Be Yourself, Be Amazing," captured the atmosphere of the event. It is a safe and creative environment where every child is encouraged to shine at their own pace. As Jamie noted at the close of the showcase, the academy is not just about red carpets or a taste of fame, although students do have those opportunities. It is about belonging, making friends, gaining confidence and discovering one's own voice through the arts.

The celebration concluded with medals and special achievement awards presented to students who had made notable progress in confidence, speaking, performing and directing. At PQA, every child can become a diamond; sometimes they simply need someone to believe in them.

Romana Sustar
Freelance Journalist



Epsom Choral Society maintains its good standing

Epsom Choral Society's performance of Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* on 22 November 2025 at St Martin's Church was an evening defined by emotional depth, musical discipline, and an unwavering sense of communal purpose. Under the assured direction of conductor Julian Collings, the choir and English Sinfonietta delivered a moving and meticulously shaped reading of one of the choral repertoire's most profound sacred works.

The church's warm acoustic proved especially well suited to Dvořák's expansive, reverent writing; the opening lament, "Stabat mater dolorosa," unfolded with a gentle solemnity that felt both intimate and monumental. The lower voices of the choir set a somber foundation, their tone grounded and resonant, while the sopranos floated above with clarity. Collings shaped the movement with confidence, never allowing the pacing to sag despite the movement's extended emotional breadth.

The quartet of soloists—Lisa Swayne (soprano), Judy Louie Brown (mezzo-soprano), John Findon (tenor), and Niall Anderson (bass)—brought a balanced and expressive presence to the performance. Swayne's soprano was notable for its bright, ringing top notes, which soared effortlessly. Brown's mezzo offered a warm, velvety counterpoint, particularly effective in the more



introspective sections, where her phrasing carried a natural, speech-like flow.

Tenor John Findon delivered a compelling and lyrical performance, bringing both tenderness and urgency to his solos. His projection was clear, even in the church's generous acoustic. Bass Niall Anderson provided a strong anchor, his tone rich and reassuring—especially striking in moments where Dvořák's writing descends into darker, more meditative territory. Together, the four voices blended with admirable cohesion, never overshadowing the chorus but instead weaving in and out of the larger texture with sensitivity.

The English Sinfonietta supported the vocal forces with refinement and expressive nuance. The string section, in particular, brought a glowing warmth to the score, highlighting Dvořák's gift for intertwining grief with deep spiritual hope. The woodwind solos were elegantly shaped.

Collings maintained clear and communicative direction throughout, guiding transitions with fluid movement and drawing out the work's emotional arc with thoughtful pacing. By the time the triumphant closing movement, "Quando corpus morietur," arrived, the ensemble had built a compelling narrative of suffering transformed into hope, making the final "Amen" genuinely uplifting.

What stood out most across the performance, however, was the sense of collective commitment. Epsom Choral Society attracted a sizeable audience despite the inclement weather, and there was a real sense of community between the choir and the audience.

Jane Wilkinson

Epsom gets a bit of French polish

Those who were fortunate enough to be in the audience for **Epsom Chamber Choir's** concert at St Martin's Church, Epsom, on Saturday 15 November were treated to a superb recital of French choral music. The first half comprised mainly unaccompanied short pieces by 20th-century French composers, with one work by American composer Eric Whitacre. From the outset the choir's exceptional quality was evident as their exhilarating sound reverberated around the superb acoustic of St Martin's. Maurice Duruflé's *Quatre motets*, based on plainsong melodies, were beautifully sung, conveying every nuance of this intimate music. Whitacre's *Sainte-Chapelle*, inspired by a visit to the medieval Parisian chapel, mirrored in vivid choral writing the stunning stained-glass windows for which the building is famous, its dissonant cluster-chords and wide dynamic range skilfully negotiated under the clear direction of conductor Jack Apperley.

The sopranos and altos were then given a chance to shine with three pieces for upper voices only. The ethereal purity of the sopranos' tone was especially apparent in Lili Boulanger's *Pie Jesu*, accompanied by string quartet, harp and organ. The first half concluded with Pierre Villette's *Attende Domine*, composed in 1983 for Worcester Cathedral Choir. Villette's highly chromatic writing, with hints of Poulenc, Messiaen, Gregorian chant and jazz, presents real challenges even for accomplished choirs, but the confident voices of Epsom Chamber Choir proved more than equal to the task, bringing the opening half to a thrilling close.

After the interval the choir gave a moving account of Fauré's ever-popular *Requiem*, accompanied by an excellent ensemble of violin, cello, harp and organ. This reduced instrumentation lent a special intimacy to the performance, well suited to the reflective character of much of the work, though perhaps less so for its more dynamic sections. Jack Apperley directed sensitively throughout, and soloists Caroline Burgess, Roger Miller and Nic Ash all sang with assurance and musicality. It is impossible to be unmoved by the ethereal beauty of Fauré's masterpiece, nowhere more so than in the transcendent *In Paradisum*, its soaring melody and murmuring harp bringing the evening to a sublime conclusion.

John Bawden

Blackhawk Quintet bring West Coast cool to Epsom

For an increasing number of informed regulars, Epsom Jazz Club has become a nearby haven of quality music attracting national and international talent down to our own corner of Surrey.

For those not yet in the know, it's worth broaching the growing roster of world-class musicians and singers who've walked through the doors at the Comrades Club venue.

It includes Tony Kofi, who blew his sax at Glastonbury this year in the long-running jazz funk outfit Cymande's latest incarnation,



trumpeter Andy Davies who with local guitar star Nigel Price brought along the rest of the amazing Ronnie Scott's house band (EJC also has jazz lamps on the tables), and Alan Barnes – for whom the cliché 'luminary' is, in his case, actually warranted.

Past line-ups of award-winning players also include Hannah Horton, Allison Neale, Emma Rawicz, Karen Sharp and, in a genre that may be said to err sometimes on the side of seniority, the club has carefully promoted some up-and-coming artists, with exciting young vocalists on the bill like Ineza and Annie Majin.

Backdrop set, it is celebrated drummer Matt Skelton breaking new ground in October bringing his Blackhawk Quintet to Epsom – it's been strictly quartets on the Comrades' small stage to date – for an evening exploring the work of fellow sticksman Shelly Manne. The show focused on an intense week in the life and career of this West Coast "cool" jazz innovator, band leader, club owner and movie music composer, who in the 1950s and 60s was often pictured nattily dressed at his drums, in jacket and tie, a big smile on his face.

This five-piece is named (deliberately portmanteau, it seems) after a short residency of concerts at San Francisco's Black Hawk club in the autumn of 1959, recorded with a view to releasing a single live album that became a series of four scintillating records, such was the quantity of quality material, followed by a fifth album in the early 1990s when the whole lot was re-released on CD.

Skelton's men for the evening were Leon Greening – perhaps my favourite jazz pianist working in the country right now – Mark Crooks, whose tenor sax croons, glides and purrs like Lester Young, Stan Getz or indeed Manne's tenorman on the Black Hawk records Richie Kamuca; hard-swinging young horn player Jim Davison (once lead trumpet in the National Youth Jazz Orchestra, now leading his own bands and scooping awards); and Jeremy Brown, one of the go-to bassists on the UK scene who's played at Epsom at least half a dozen times in various line-ups.

It's a rare treat to hear five musicians on this stage, with two brass-blowing front men. The sound is full and punchy, hitting right to the fore during the energetic thematic heads, and adding that extra bit of variety as the players take their solo turns.

The band took the vocally enthusiastic crowd on a fabulous journey through the recorded sessions, from the mid-tempo bopper *Pullin' Strings* to the smoothly striding *Eclipse of Spain*, via the hard bop of Benny Golson composition *Step Lightly*.

The night's focus on the short series of Black Hawk gigs – with occasional forays into other Shelly Manne albums (the grooving, Latin-tinged *The Breeze and I* from *Boss Sounds!*) or pieces by his various collaborators including Henry Mancini (the exquisite ballad *Dreamsville*) – provided a satisfying coherence to the concert you don't always get.

That satisfaction only deepened with the scholarly asides, stories and nuggets of background about Manne, the gigs and the man's musical life that Skelton amused us with between numbers.

Oh, and did I mention the drums? Skelton beats them hands down.

Amanda Gregory

Epsom Jazz Club puts on concerts at the Comrades Club, 1 The Parade, Epsom KT18 5BT. The next evening will feature violinist Matt Holborn and his quartet on 27 November, starting 7:30 pm.

Photo by Steven McCormick of Steven McCormick Photography

Music and dance for Ukraine at Epsom Methodist Church

The 13th Ukraine Music Evening took place on Saturday 25th October at Epsom Methodist Church, organised by Lionel Blackman with the support of the Epsom Refugee Network and Surrey Stands With Ukraine. Extra seats were brought in as the Church filled to the brim.

The Worshipful Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, Councillor Robert Leach (RA Nonsuch), opened the event with words of welcome and appreciation for the town's ongoing solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

For the first time, the programme featured a Ukrainian dance ensemble — **Stephania**, choreographed and led by **Alina Luts** — whose performances introduced vibrant movement and colour between the musical sets.

The modern section of the programme offered a change of mood. Epsom-based performers **Helin Konyar** (vocals), a graduate of



Epsom's Laine Theatre Arts and **Vladislav Voloshin** (saxophone) presented three songs: *Almost There* (Anika Noni Rose), *Dream a Little Dream* (Robbie Williams) and the Ukrainian favourite *Stari Fotohrafyi* by Skryabin, combining contemporary and national influences with confident stage presence.

The evening continued with **Vadym Perig**, an alumnus of the nearby Yehudi Menuhin School, who travelled from his new home in Vienna to perform **Robert Schumann's Violin Sonata No. 1**, accompanied by the accomplished Ukrainian pianist **Svitlana Kosenko**. Their expressive partnership recalled the high standard of the first Ukraine Music Evening in 2022, in which both artists also appeared.

Pianist **Maria Zhornikova** returned to Epsom with a refined interpretation of **Enrique Granados' Eight Poetic Valses**, followed by **À Giverny**, a short composition by the organiser Lionel Blackman. Projected images of Monet's gardens accompanied the performance, and the Mayor's purchase of the sheet music contributed to funds for Surrey Stands With Ukraine.

Further performances by **Stephania** included traditional Ukrainian dances such as *My Kyiv*, *Polka*, and *Chycheri*, performed by a talented ensemble of soloists.

As is now tradition, the evening concluded with the **Renaissance Choir** under the direction of **Nataliia Zadorizhna** and conductor **Dana Kuhlyk**, singing the Ukrainian National Anthem and a selection of beloved folk songs — *Oh, in the Cherry Orchard*, *Why Didn't You Come*, *Why, Why, My Land*, and *Hey, Falcons*.

All proceeds from the concert went to support the professional musicians who continue to share Ukraine's rich artistic culture with audiences in Epsom.

Nina Kaye

From Epsom to the Big Screen

Dean Puckett Returns Home with His Debut Feature *The Severed Sun* for a Special Screening and Q&A next week Wednesday 8th October!

A special homecoming event is set to light up the screen at Epsom Picturehouse as local filmmaker Dean Puckett returns to share his debut feature film, *The Severed Sun*. Dean, a former student of Glyn High School and UCA Farnham, moved from London to Surrey as a teenager before embarking on a filmmaking career that has taken him to major international festivals. Now, he returns to Epsom for a screening and Q&A celebrating the launch of his haunting British folk horror debut.

Set in an isolated church community gripped by paranoia and superstition after a brutal murder, *The Severed Sun* is a chilling tale of faith, fear, and folklore. The feature marks the first full-length film from Puckett — produced by Rebecca Wolff (Grasp the Nettle Films) and Jude Goldrei (Lunar Lander Films) — and had its world premiere at Fantastic Fest 2024.

Following screenings at Picturehouse cinemas across the UK, this special Epsom event will feature a post-screening Q&A with Dean, who will share insights into the creative process, behind-the-scenes stories, and what it takes to bring a first feature from script to screen.

"I discovered my love for filmmaking in a small cupboard at Glyn High School in Epsom. This was entirely thanks to one exceptional teacher, Mr Ramasami, who believed in me. Despite struggling academically, he saw that I had a flair for visual storytelling. I lived in Worcester Park from the age of 12 and took countless trips to the cinema in Epsom during my youth, so it's incredibly gratifying and moving for me to return now with my own feature film. "

— Dean Puckett, Director of *The Severed Sun*

"It's a real privilege to work with homegrown talent like Dean and to share his debut feature with the community that helped shape his creative journey. Events like this are not only exciting cinematic moments, they're also a chance to show aspiring filmmakers that it is possible to follow your passion and make something special. Community is at the heart of what we do at Picturehouse, and hosting screenings like this — which bring people together and celebrate local success — is exactly what our cinema is all about."

The screening is a chance not only to experience one of the most distinctive new British films of the year but also to celebrate a hometown success story — and discover what it's really like to turn a dream into a debut.

Event Details:



Epsom Picturehouse, Epsom Square, Epsom, KT19 8AG

The Severed Sun: followed by a Q&A with Dean Puckett and filmmakers



Tuesday 8 October, 6:30pm



Tickets: www.picturehouses.com/epsom

Image of Dean Puckett

Guildford theatre stage for a community cultural hub

Yvonne Arnaud Theatre marks 60th birthday with major transformation

On Wednesday 10 September, the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford hosted a 60th Birthday Concert celebrating both a milestone anniversary and the completion of a major regeneration project made possible by substantial funding from Your Fund Surrey.

Landmark investment from Surrey County Council

In June 2023, Surrey County Council approved more than £2 million from its Your Fund Surrey Large Community Project scheme for the theatre's 'Play Your Part' capital campaign. It is the largest single award ever made under the fund, designed to secure the Yvonne Arnaud's future as a cultural community hub with theatre at its heart.

A theatre transformed

Over the past two years, the theatre has delivered radical improvements including a new accessible lift, modernised toilets on every floor, flexible multi-purpose rooms for community groups, a reconfigured front of house and a more welcoming ground floor foyer.

During the anniversary concert, VIP guests including His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh toured the new spaces and enjoyed performances spanning six decades of productions, with contributions from the volunteer choir and Young Company.

Six decades at the heart of the community

Since opening in 1965, the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre has been central to Guildford's cultural life and an important driver of the local economy. Its outreach programmes and community initiatives already play a significant role across Surrey. The new facilities, supported by Your Fund Surrey, are intended to ensure the theatre can meet the needs of residents and visitors for the next half century.

Voices of support

Denise Turner-Stewart, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community, said the council was proud to back the project:

"We would like to congratulate the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre on the delivery of this flagship Your Fund Surrey project, thanks to over £2 million of Large Community Projects Funding, to develop Guildford's iconic and much-beloved building into a friendly, accessible community hub to serve the whole of Surrey.

"Your Fund Surrey is all about empowering our residents to Make It Happen, by significantly investing in projects that will make a real lasting impact for local communities.



"This long-anticipated renovation project at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre is a great example of how Your Fund Surrey investment has been used to create vibrant, resilient spaces where residents and community groups can come together for social and cultural enrichment, both now and in the future."

Theatre Director and Chief Executive Joanna Read added:

"We can't thank Surrey County Council's Your Fund Surrey enough for supporting our determination to make the theatre accessible and sustainable for the future. We are also hugely grateful to the many people who, early in our journey, wrote letters of support for our ambitions to refurbish the theatre, and those who donated to our campaign."

"We are delighted that our building is now able to welcome even more people to enjoy the fantastic benefits of theatre and arts participation."

About Your Fund Surrey

Your Fund Surrey was launched in 2020 to back projects that deliver lasting benefits across the county. Since then, it has enabled communities to improve their local environment, build new spaces, enhance cultural venues and develop green areas, creating a stronger sense of pride and belonging.

By investing in diverse initiatives, the scheme is helping to build vibrant, resilient communities and demonstrates what can be achieved when residents come together to make it happen.

The Duke of Edinburgh addresses the audience, in front of the assembled concert company, before unveiling a commemorative plaque – credit: Craig Fuller

Sam Jones – Reporter



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."