

## Students Tuesday takeover of Epsom Picturehouse

16 January 2026



Students from **University for the Creative Arts (UCA)** in Epsom are set to return to **Epsom Picturehouse** later this month with another imaginative cinema takeover – this time built around the release of *Marty Supreme*.

The one-night event takes place on **Tuesday 20th January**, with activities beginning at **6.30pm**, and forms part of UCA Epsom’s *Experience Economy* module. Rather than focusing on conventional event mana

The January screening will again see students working directly with the Picturehouse team to create an enhanced, interactive evening that goes beyond simply watching a film. While full details are being kept under wraps, organisers promise live elements and audience interaction designed to complement the themes and setting of the film.

The collaboration builds on last year’s well-received student takeover, which re-imagined *Be Kind Rewind* as a playful, hands-on cinema experience. That event featured live performances, green-screen activities and interactive installations that transformed the building into a temporary creative hub and demonstrated how cinema can function as a shared social space rather than a purely passive one.

This year’s focus is *Marty Supreme*, a new film set in 1950s New York and starring **Timothée Chalamet** as Marty Mauser, a driven outsider determined to become a champion table-tennis player and turn the sport into a nationwide phenomenon. The story’s emphasis on confidence, ambition and refusing to be overlooked has provided fertile ground for students developing ideas around performance, identity and audience participation.

Epsom Picturehouse, which opened in 2018, has become a central part of the town’s cultural life, combining six screens showing independent cinema and mainstream releases with a café-bar that is used for talks, community events and special screenings. The venue is part of the Picturehouse chain, known nationally for its focus on curated programming and local partnerships.

UCA’s Epsom campus, located at the former Epsom School of Art, specialises in creative business, marketing and performance-related courses, with an emphasis on practical collaboration with external organisations. Projects such as the Picturehouse takeover form part of the university’s wider approach to linking students with real-world audiences and venues.

Joe Stroud, Marketing Manager at Epsom Picturehouse, said the partnership reflects a shared commitment to creativity and community, adding that working with students brings fresh perspectives into the cinema and helps re-imagine how audiences experience film.

The *Marty Supreme* cinema takeover is a **one-night-only** event, with tickets available via the Picturehouse website.

Sam Jones – Reporter



## Epsom Dance Group in World Championship

16 January 2026



An Epsom-based dance competition team is preparing to take to the international stage after being selected to represent Team England at the Dance World Cup 2026 in Dublin next summer.

CMDC (Charmille Dance Collective) received the news just before Christmas that one of its groups and two solo dancers had been chosen for the prestigious world finals, following national qualifying rounds.

Founder Charlotte Liddle said:

“We are thrilled that one of our groups and two solo dancers have been selected to represent Team England at the Dance World Cup in Dublin next year.”

The Dance World Cup is an annual, large-scale international competition focused on children and young adults, typically aged between five and 25. Dancers qualify through national competitions or video selection before reaching the world finals, making selection highly competitive.

The 2026 finals will take place at the Convention Centre Dublin from Wednesday 8 to Saturday 18 July 2026. Organisers expect more than 120,000 competitors from over 70 countries, competing across a wide range of styles including classical, contemporary, street, hip hop and theatrical dance. The event is widely regarded as one of the largest all-genre youth dance competitions in the world and a major milestone for young dancers.

Charmille Dance Collective was founded by sisters Charlotte and Millie Liddle, both graduates of the Laine Theatre of Arts. Despite being a relatively new team, CMDC has already built a strong competitive record, including a second-place finish at the All England finals in 2024.

Co-founder Millie Liddle said:

“We are so proud of the girls and how far they have come in such a short time. Their dedication and hard work have been incredible, and they truly deserve this

opportunity.”

Before heading to Dublin, the team will be balancing intensive training with fund-raising activities to help cover travel and competition costs, as they look to give themselves the best chance of building on Team England’s previous successes at the event.

Charmille Dance Collective is a community dance team based in Epsom. Founded by sisters Charlotte and Millie Liddle, former students at Epsom’s Laine Theatre Arts, the group competes at regional and national dance competitions across the UK.

Charlotte and Millie welcome help to fund the trip:

<https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/charmille-dance-world-cup>

Sam Jones – Reporter



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## Call to join the merry Morris Men of St Mary’s Ewell

16 January 2026



The friendly team of Ewell St Mary’s Morris Men are holding an open day for anyone who would like to try out a bit of Morris Dancing. No experience needed.

Morris Dancing is a very old British tradition going back more than 600 years and whilst some people enjoy the colour, the cheerful music, the fun and whole spectacle, they sometimes feel a bit nervous to actually try it, this open day is an ideal opportunity, no audience, just a lot of very friendly people. Give it a try, there’s nothing to lose, and it might just be that thing that ticks your box. It’s Free, it’s Open to all and there’s no commitment

There are many reasons to try out Morris Dancing and if you asked a hundred different Morris Dancers you would get a hundred different reasons, however these are some of the more common reasons.

It is a very old tradition and should be supported

It keeps people fit and trim It is fun The people are all friendly It beats boredom Any age can do it

2-4pm Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> January, Bourne Hall in Spring Street, Ewell Village KT17 1UF is on the 406, 293 bus routes and has plenty of Car Parking available. Ewell West, and Ewell East railway stations are also nearby.

Everyone welcome, from Epsom, Cheam, Ashted, Sutton, Malden, in fact anywhere. Just come along. On Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> January.

Musicians wishing to try the music are also welcome, again, no experience required.

More information

Website - <https://ewellmorris.co.uk>

email - [contact@ewellmorris.co.uk](mailto:contact@ewellmorris.co.uk)

Facebook - [ewellstmarymorris](https://www.facebook.com/ewellstmarymorris)

Alan Greenwood

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## Festival of Friendship -Epsom and Ewell - Ukraine

16 January 2026



From 27 January to 1 February, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is proud to partner with Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network, Epsom Library, and Epsom Picturehouse to host a borough Festival of Friendship – Ukraine.

This week-long celebration will showcase traditional Ukrainian crafts, music, and cultural heritage, while highlighting the friendships formed between Ukrainian nationals who have settled in the borough and the local community that has welcomed them.

The festival offers a vibrant programme of exhibitions, workshops, films, and live performances, all designed to share Ukrainian culture and foster community connections.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has worked with partners to curate and run a week of workshops as part of the Festival of Friendship – Ukraine.

**Key Highlights:**

- Free Workshops and Exhibitions at Epsom Library, including Ukrainian block printing, paper cutting art, wool crafts, and beading. *Spaces are limited;*

*please arrive early to secure your spot. All materials provided.*

- Film Screenings at Epsom Picturehouse, accompanied by live Ukrainian music performances. *Tickets available via the Epsom Picturehouse website.*
- Children’s Activities, including a treasure hunt, face painting, and a special Paddington Bear appearance, at Epsom Library.

Speaking of the upcoming festival, Councillor **Clive Woodbridge**, (RA Ewell Village) Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Community said, “The Festival of Friendship – Ukraine is a heartwarming celebration of culture and community spirit, it brings together Ukrainian nationals and local residents through shared traditions, crafts, music and friendship. Events like this remind us that kindness and mutual understanding are at the heart of a thriving borough—thank you to everyone helping to make this festival possible.”

Jo Sherring, Lead from Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network added, “Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network are delighted to partner with Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Epsom Library and Epsom Picturehouse to create this celebration of our friendship with Ukrainian nationals who live in our community. Since the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022, we have been working with Ukrainian nationals who fled to the UK, helping them access work, housing, schools and community. Their courage, resilience and determination have been an example to us. As we have helped them to navigate life in the UK, we have enjoyed building friendships and learning about their culture and traditions.

The Festival of Friendship is a chance for our Ukrainian friends to share their traditions and culture with the local community with activities happening during the week. We hope you will find time to join us during the week to be part of this celebration.”

#### Festival Timetable Highlights:

- **Tuesday 27 January:** Opening Celebration at Epsom Library; Ukrainian craft workshops and exhibitions.
- **Thursday 29 January:** Performance by Renaissance Choir and screening of *Rocky Road to Berlin* at Epsom Picturehouse.
- **Sunday 1 February:** Music from Yuliia Komyshan (Ukrainian Bandura) followed by screenings of *Sanatorium* and *Home for Ukraine* at Epsom Picturehouse

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council



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## Epsom Christmas Concert Triumphs After Last-Minute Conductor Crisis

16 January 2026



What could have been a genuine crisis for Epsom Choral Society’s Christmas Concert on Saturday became a remarkable story of teamwork, professionalism, and musical courage.

The day began with unwelcome news. Early in the morning, Musical Director, Julian Collings, phoned to say he had been struck down with flu and was unable to conduct that evening’s concert. This was to be no ordinary performance: it was completely sold out and featured two world premieres, making cancellation unthinkable.

From his sickbed, Julian immediately set about trying to find a replacement conductor for the evening. His first call was to Neil Ferris, conductor of the Leith Hill Music Festival. Unfortunately, Neil was unable to step in at such short notice, but he suggested a name: Victoria Ely. Crucially, ECS Chair, Helen Phillips, was able to recommend her with confidence, having seen Victoria in action when she took a rehearsal for Neil at one of the Leith Hill Music Festival rehearsals last Spring.

Victoria Ely, who had never met the choir before, bravely agreed to conduct the concert with just four hours’ notice.

Meanwhile, Julian faced another formidable task. From home, he painstakingly scanned all of his marked-up scores – 20 different pieces, the parts for the brass quintet, and his detailed annotations and introductory notes. These were sent at speed to the ECS’s Concert Management team, who rushed to print everything so it could be placed in Victoria’s hands as soon as she arrived and so the brass had something to play! It was a race against the clock, but by 1pm everything was in place.

That afternoon’s rehearsal was necessarily intense. Rather than imposing her own methods, Victoria immediately showed her musicianship and collaborative spirit by asking the choir to demonstrate how each piece had been rehearsed. She listened carefully, adapted quickly, and worked with the choir’s established approach, creating a sense of trust and calm despite the extraordinary circumstances.

By the time the evening concert arrived, what might have felt like an emergency substitution instead felt like a confident partnership. Victoria conducted with assurance, clarity, and good humour, guiding the choir through a demanding and varied programme. Her warm presence and engaging manner extended to the audience, who responded with enthusiasm and obvious enjoyment.

Against all odds, the concert was not merely rescued, it was a resounding success. For Epsom Choral Society the evening became a powerful reminder of the strength of its musical community and the generosity of fellow professionals. Thanks to Julian’s determination, Helen’s quick thinking, the Concert Manager’s efficiency, and above all Victoria Ely’s courage and skill, a potential disaster was transformed into a memorable and uplifting Christmas celebration.

Nina Kaye



## Epsom mural project to celebrate neurodiversity

16 January 2026



A major new public art project celebrating neurodiversity is planned for Epsom, led by local autistic artist **Marcele Silvina Rodrigues White**, following support from the rail operator and council to create a large mural close to Epsom railway station.

The mural, expected to be painted in late spring or early summer next year, aims to raise awareness of neurodiversity while celebrating inclusive artistic expression. It will involve artists who are autistic, neurodivergent, and disabled, with the project designed to give visibility to artists who often face barriers within the mainstream art world.

Marcele, who has lived in Epsom for the past seven years, said the project is both personal and community-focused. After moving from London, she describes settling in Epsom as “coming home”, drawn by its green spaces, calm rhythm of life and supportive community. It was in Epsom, five years ago, that she began painting and started the artistic journey that has since taken her work across the UK and internationally.

An autistic artist and curator, Marcelle has exhibited widely, including in London, Greece, New York and Rome. In 2024 her work was shown internationally, including at an exhibition organised by DaisY at The Lightbox in Woking and later at the Dantebus Art Gallery in Rome. She subsequently exhibited at Art Expo in New York and was invited to present her work in France at a special event organised by Fondazione Effeto Arte.

Alongside her own practice, Marcelle has focused on creating platforms for other artists. In March 2025 she launched *Evoking Connections*, her own exhibition and arts initiative, at Horton in Epsom. The event brought together autistic, neurodivergent and disabled artists with the aim of raising awareness of neurodiversity and celebrating difference through creativity. Further editions followed at venues including Art & Grind in Guildford and Caballo Lounge in Epsom, with participating artists including those with multiple sclerosis, wheelchair users, autistic artists and neurotypical contributors.

More recently, Marcelle was selected as one of the curators for the DaisY-Chain network, which supports artists in the spectrum and artists with different kinds of disabilities. She also shares her artwork and advocacy through her Instagram page, *thoughts\_art\_poem*.

The planned Epsom mural will reflect these values, with design approval forming part of the next stage of the project. The rail operator has expressed enthusiasm for the proposal and may also provide financial support, subject to confirmation. Images from Marcelle’s previous work will be used to accompany coverage of the project, and a group photograph of Marcelle with participating artists will form part of the public launch.

Marcele said she hopes the mural will not only brighten a prominent public space, but also help challenge perceptions around disability and neurodiversity. “I understand the transformative power that art can have in our lives,” she said. “I want others to experience that same sense of expression, connection and empowerment.”

Further details about the mural design and painting dates are expected to be confirmed in the coming months.

Sam Jones – Reporter



## Tragedy of War Hero turned writer who lived in Epsom

16 January 2026



In June 1960, Douglas Baber, 42, was found comatose through drink in the garden of his former home in Woodcote Green, a well-to-do housing estate in Epsom. A court appearance followed, during which the magistrate noted that Baber had been before the Epsom bench seven times on drink-related charges. Baber, for his part, expressed appreciation for the care the Epsom constabulary had shown him while in custody. The Sutton and Epsom Advertiser described him as a “local author”, but there was far more to Douglas Gordon Baber than that.

Born in Belfast in 1918, he was living in middle-class comfort in South Croydon by 1921 in a household that included his mother Isabella, siblings and two servants. His father, Charles Johnstone Baber, was absent, later remarrying in 1929 and fathering a daughter, Hazel. Charles was an entrepreneur in the high-end footwear trade, at one time operating a shop on London’s Regent Street.

The family later moved to Bexhill on the south coast. At 11, Douglas came to public attention when newspapers reported his dramatic rescue after being swept out to sea by Channel currents — perhaps an early sign of the adventurous spirit that would define him. He developed a passion for flight and, in 1935 at just 17 years old, obtained a flying licence in a Gipsy Moth plane. On his certificate, he described himself as a student in boot and shoe manufacturing, likely intending to follow his father’s trade.

In 1937 Douglas travelled to Canada, finding work in factory administration. But the outbreak of the Second World War brought those plans to an end. He returned to England, enlisted in the RAF and, at 21, was flying bomber planes over occupied Europe as a Flight Lieutenant in 77 Squadron.

On 17 August 1941 he bailed out over Belgium and survived. He fled the crash site and was given refuge by the Rigaux family, farmers in Zingem, who risked their lives by sheltering him under German occupation. After nearly three weeks, German soldiers raided the farm following a suspected tip-off. Douglas was captured and the Rigaux family taken away to an uncertain fate. At Gestapo HQ in Brussels, he later said he was first subjected to rough treatment, then friendliness, then threats to shoot him — a deliberate psychological tactic.

Douglas passed through several POW camps: Dulag Luft in Germany, then Oflag XC in Lübeck, followed by Oflag VI-B Warburg, where he was imprisoned at the same time as the celebrated pilot Douglas Bader. The similarity in their names likely caused administrative confusion, and it is improbable the two men were not at least aware of each other.

In 1942 Baber was transferred to Oflag XXI-B Schubin in Poland, where fellow prisoners included future Chancellor Anthony Barber and Eric Williams, author of *The Wooden Horse*. He was later sent to Stalag Luft III at Sagan — now Zagan, Poland — famous for *The Great Escape*. Fellow prisoners included Paul Brickhill, who would later write *Reach for the Sky*, and actors Peter Butterworth and Rupert Davies. In February 1945 Douglas was moved again, to Marlag Nord, where he was soon liberated by Allied forces.

After returning home, Douglas collaborated with two former POWs to write *Oflag 3*, a play about prison camp life. Directed by Charles Hawtrey and featuring a young Pete Murray, it was staged at the X Theatre in Richmond and well received. Misleading online claims that Hawtrey collaborated with Douglas Bader rather than Douglas Baber have unfortunately muddled the historical record.

Douglas married Phyllis Fox in 1947. Their daughter Vivienne was born in 1950, and the family settled first in Christchurch Mount and later on the Woodcote Estate. His writing career flourished. He first signed with avant-garde publisher Werner Laurie, then with Heinemann, who released his debut crime novel *My Death is a Mockery* in 1952. The book, involving the murder of a policeman, was an immediate success and was quickly adapted into a film starring Donald Houston, Kathleen Byron and Bill Kerr.

The film became embroiled in the notorious Craig and Bentley case after Christopher Craig, the 16-year-old who shot PC Sidney Miles, revealed he had seen it earlier that day. Tabloid speculation unfairly pointed towards Baber, and he began receiving hate mail. This publicity placed immense strain on him and his family. Douglas had already shown vulnerability: in 1950 he was convicted of assaulting a ticket collector after a POW reunion. He expressed deep remorse in court, admitting to having drunk too much.

Through the 1950s Douglas published prolifically, producing *Where Eagles Gather*, *The Guarded Years*, *Love on the Verge*, *A Road to Disaster*, *The Mortal Triumph* and *The Slender Thread*, alongside short stories and journalism. He also published under the name John Ritson and worked as a publishing editor and executive. In 1956 he became advertising promotion manager at ABC TV, part of the early ITV network. On the surface, life in the stockbroker belt appeared successful.

But privately Douglas was spiralling. He increasingly found himself in Epsom Police Station for drink-related incidents, and once smashed his car into a shop in Bexhill. His marriage appears to have come under great strain. According to his daughter Vivienne, Douglas was devastated when he learned during the 1950s that members of the courageous Rigaux family who had sheltered him had been murdered by the Gestapo or deported to camps, where some later died. She said the guilt haunted him for the rest of his life.

It is easy to imagine how the emotional burden drove him towards alcohol. In 1963 he was still producing work — he published a short story in the *Birmingham Evening Mail* and took a post as advertisement controller on the Reverend Timothy Beaumont’s magazine *Aspect*. But on 21 October 1963 Douglas Gordon Baber died at 21 The Hill, Wheathampstead, near St Albans. He was only 45.

One of his later works, *God’s Blind Eye* (1960), features a businessman battling alcoholism. A line from the book seems to echo Baber’s own torment: “*When the effects of the alcohol wore off, the sense of impending disaster and loneliness was far worse, crouched in his mind like an enemy.*”

Martin Knight



## Surrey author’s unexpected journey to global football goodwill

16 January 2026



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

16 January 2026



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

16 January 2026



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