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Epsom Choral Society delivers an evening of choral masterpieces

20 November 2026



Epsom Choral Society ranks among the top cultural highlights of the town. The choir performs at a number of venues in the area; on this occasion, however, the concert was held in St Martin's Parish Church.

On a chilly autumn evening, a large audience assembled in the church to hear three choral masterpieces, one very new and the others established repertoire, all expertly played by the English Sinfonietta and sung with huge enthusiasm by Epsom Choral Society (ECS). The conductor was ECS's Musical Director, Julian Collings.

The evening's concert came about as a result of a generous legacy from the late Vivian Brown (1926–2023), who had been a keen member of ECS for many years.

ECS was joined by five soloists. They had plenty to do, either as individuals, in pairs and even trios. Their names were Lisa Swayne (soprano), Ana Beard Fernandez (soprano), Henry Capper-Allen (counter-tenor), James Beddoe (tenor) and Mark Nathan (baritone).

Bach's Mass in G Minor

It is probably anachronistic to claim it, but Bach recycled a lot of his music – after all, why let a good idea go to waste? The B Minor Mass is a famous example of this 'recycling of music'.

Admittedly not on the same scale as the B Minor, Bach also wrote some Lutheran Masses during his Leipzig years. The Mass in G Minor, BWV 235, opened the concert. It is a *Missa Brevis* in so many words: just two movements, Kyrie eleison followed by the Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Both movements display all the typical Bachian characteristics: expressive solo numbers ranging from the delicate to the rumbustious; masterly instrumentation; and effortless counterpoint, i.e. the skill of combining two or more 'themes' or tunes in such a way that there is no clash.

In the Gloria, the choir alternates with the three soloists, culminating in Cum Sancto Spiritu Amen – 'with the Holy Ghost, Amen'.

Clive Osgood's Magnificat

The Magnificat by Clive Osgood followed. Clive is Director of Music and Organist at St Bartholomew's Church, Haslemere.

The Magnificat dates from 2024 and was written as a companion piece to Bach's Magnificat, which we heard later. Osgood retains Bach's framework of choir intertwined with solo numbers, but his musical language is far more modern.

Inter alia, I heard allusions to Chilcott's 'Little Jazz Mass' and echoes of 'Oedipus Rex'; but the spine-chilling opening is surely Osgood's own. The audience sat on tenterhooks of expectation throughout.

Bach's Magnificat brings the evening to a close

After the interval, it was the turn of Bach's own Magnificat, and this famous work brought the evening to a resounding conclusion.

Here, the effect was as a glass of clear water after the harmonic and orchestral riches of the Osgood.

The listener detects how Bach – recently appointed as Kantor at the prestigious Thomaskirche in Leipzig – wanted to impress his employers. Hence the five-part choir, five soloists and orchestra including trumpets.

All very succinct, as Bach shortens the work by dropping long arias in favour of dramatic momentum.

Timothy Tomkins

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