



Epsom gets a bit of French polish

23 November 2025



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