

# Entertainment & Leisure

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On the ball: young tenors Alberto Sousa, Alex Haigh and Richard Dowling play the Kenton Theatre on Saturday, October 28

## Young tenors are up for the cup at Kenton

SAY the words "Italia '90" and what comes to mind? Gazza's tears and the nerve-shredding penalty misses of Stuart Pearce and Chris Waddle in England's semi-final defeat to Germany would top the list for many.

Once the dust had settled, however, our second-greatest World Cup campaign ended up having another quite separate cultural legacy — courtesy of the BBC's decision to use Luciano Pavarotti's 1972 recording of Puccini's *Nessun Dorma* as the theme music of its coverage.

The aria, taken from *Turandot*, subsequently reached number two in the UK singles chart and was to remain the tenor's trademark song while going on to become a sporting anthem known to millions worldwide.

By coincidence, at the time of his chart success, Pavarotti had just joined forces with fellow tenors José Carreras and Plácido Domingo to stage a "Three Tenors" concert at the ancient Baths of Caracalla in Rome on the eve of the World Cup final.

The album of the concert went on to outsell all other classical recordings

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worldwide, creating something of an opera boom in the process.

Purists probably gave it a miss, but thousands flocked to Pavarotti's free concert in Hyde Park in July 1991, while the Three Tenors later played Wembley Stadium in 1996.

Much of which sadly passed Alex Haigh by — as he was only two years old in 1990. But two decades on from the Three Tenors' heyday their influence continues to be felt.

Nowhere more so than at the Kenton Theatre, where next Saturday (October 28) Alex and fellow tenors Richard Dowling and Alberto Sousa are staging a "Three Tenors" concert of their own.

Alex said: "I never had a chance to see them live but what inspired me originally was their focus and concentration, whilst laughing and joking around on stage."

"In between the songs there was humour, silliness and respect, but as

soon as a song began their attention was razor-sharp. It's so clear to see.

"In terms of staging the concert, we've tried to nod our hats to some classic in-jokes from that time, but this is by no means a carbon copy — I wouldn't dare! "It's not even a tribute act, really. We don't pretend to be them. We instead try to share our passion for pieces of classic repertoire that they sang.

"The Kenton Theatre is quite an intimate venue, so while we do move around on stage we focus more on the music, as they did!"

The concert is being presented by the Henley-based charity Opera Prelude, which specialises in giving young singers a start. A share of the proceeds will be given to the Chiltern Centre, also based in Henley, which helps children and young people with disabilities.

"Three Tenors in Concert" starts at 7pm and has a running time of 115 minutes, including an interval.

Tickets are £30 and can be booked by calling the theatre (01491) 575698 or visiting [www.kentontheatre.co.uk](http://www.kentontheatre.co.uk)

Alternatively, tickets can be booked online at [www.operaprelude.com](http://www.operaprelude.com)

## Jazz quartet has the world on a string

### Review

**Jazz at St Andrew's Concerts in Caversham Saturday, October 14**

THE sight of the brightly polished opened-wide grand piano, its inner surfaces reflecting a gleaming rack of wind instruments and a "stand-up" bass was the scene that greeted the 150-strong audience for the first ever jazz performance in the Concerts in Caversham series at St Andrew's Church.

The Simon Lasky Quartet are Simon Lasky on piano, Jessica Radcliffe on vocals, Simon Bates on alto saxophone, clarinet and alto flute, and Robert Rickenberg on double bass.

As the musicians came on, the vibe was immediately tangible. Here was a group that was out to enjoy both its own company and that of its audience — natural, easy, relaxed and polished, without a hint of pretension of false bonhomie.

The evening began simply with Harold Arlen's *I've Got the World on a String*, where the immediate impact was both relaxing and reassuring:



Polished: the Simon Lasky Quartet at St Andrew's Church

the concert space's acoustic qualities were very pleasing.

Jessica Radcliffe's open commitment and consistently expressive face and body language was a delight, her voice strong and infinitely varied in nuance and tonal colour. With a real theatrical awareness she radiated sincerity, humour and intelligence through her singing. Rickenberg's bass

came across as strong and earthy, the piano gentle, soprano sax brightly soaring.

Irving Berlin's *How Deep is the Ocean* opened with bass rhythms from Rickenberg and finger snaps from Bates, creating a sparse but inviting opening, before some crisply fine scat singing from Radcliffe almost put the music before the lyrics and an alto sax solo drew the first

jazz club-style applause of the evening.

*Coming Home* from Simon Lasky's new album *Story Inside* saw declamatory, rich chords from the piano reinforced by bass and alto sax, this time with Bates's tone reminiscent of Ian Bellamy's glorious outpourings with the group Quercus in Brecon Cathedral.

Latin rhythms eased their way into the consciousness, with rapid patterns cascading from the saxophone and a high bass line and a semiquaver percussion pattern reminding us that this line-up had that unusual feature: a jazz quartet with no drummer! Again, a hint of the cathedral as the ringing sax voice rang out over Lasky's arpeggiating piano. This was highly atmospheric music, skilfully presented.

Harry Warren and Al Dublin's *I Only Have Eyes for You* was the final witty piece at the end of a great evening's entertainment — a short but highly accomplished punctuation mark that left the audience happily wanting more, some time in the hopefully not too distant future.

Marc Edwards

## Cliveden Literary Festival Reviews

### Putting history on screen

Daisy Goodwin and Amanda Foreman

QUEEN Victoria didn't only bequeath her name to an era and a culture, she also left an astonishing total of 62 million words in the shape of diaries and letters.

So said Daisy Goodwin who, together with historian Amanda Foreman, made up a panel chaired by Natalie Livingstone that discussed "Drama: how to put history on screen".

Daisy Goodwin is the creator and writer of the Sunday night hit TV series *Victoria*, while Amanda Foreman is the biographer of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, filmed a few years ago as *The Duchess* starring Keira Knightley.

There is a Cliveden connection for both Queen and duchess. Harriet, Duchess of Sutherland, was a close friend of Victoria, mistress of Cliveden and also the grand-daughter of Georgiana. When she (Harriet) grew large and less mobile she was wheeled round the grounds by the Queen, who was a frequent visitor to the great house just upriver from Windsor.

Both speakers talked to a large audience about their close, personal relationship with their subjects, and of how they are driven by the desire to bring them back to life — the kind of "recovery mission" which is often made more difficult when writing about women either because of the lack of evidence in the first place or its later destruction.

This happened even to the prolific Victoria, whose diaries were filleted and censored after her death.

For Amanda Foreman the connection to Georgiana was so intimate that, although she has written other historical books since, including an account of British involvement in the American Civil War, she hasn't felt able to begin another biography.

Both writers spoke of the emotional impact of seeing their work being committed to the screen: Daisy Goodwin watching the filming of Victoria and Albert's wedding (in Beverley Minster in Yorkshire) and Amanda Foreman witnessing an area of Greenwich recreated as a packed, bustling 18th century backdrop for a sequence in *The Duchess*.

Even so, Foreman felt the film didn't give her heroine enough agency or independence — although she said that complaining about what film-makers do to your work was like complaining about what the people you've moved into your old house have done to your kitchen.

For Goodwin, meanwhile, Queen Victoria was in control as the "prototypical working mother", and before that a girl in her late teens who woke up one morning to find herself the most powerful woman in the world.

There was interesting speculation about the relative peacefulness of the United Kingdom over the past two centuries. Was this because it has been largely the era of two queens, women who have put family, duty and service above the more militaristic and ambitious

concerns of the continental kings, kaisers and czars who have almost all gone? Without the settled, domestic example of Victoria and Albert, would we even have a royal family today?

This was an engaging discussion in front of a packed house and the grand setting of the Great Hall of Cliveden seemed a more than appropriate venue for talk of duchesses and queens.

Philip Gooden

### Running through wheat

Ian McEwan

THE author of *Atonement* gave the audience at the Cliveden Literary Festival an enjoyable glimpse into the life of one of England's most celebrated novelists.

After studying at Sussex University he decided to become a writer. "I saw writing as a way of not having to get a job."

He was taken aback by the horrified reaction to the dark and disturbing nature of his early novels *The Cement Garden* and *The Comfort of Strangers*, confessing: "I don't know where it all came from. I was a well-behaved teenager. I hadn't transgressed. I hadn't run through a wheat field — not even a wheat field — so my early short stories were my wheat field."

McEwan admitted to struggling when he first started out. "Writing didn't come to me easily to me back then. Not because of the subject matter, but because of the voice and the prose."

He offered some insights for budding novelists. "Henry James said 'The first duty of the novelist is to be interesting.' I always come back to this advice — try and be interesting."

He clarified that by interesting he wasn't referring to pulp fiction — "not suspense or dread" — but rather "emotional interest or intellectual interest — the quest for curiosity in the reader".

He added: "The novel is always interested in things going wrong."

McEwan also admitted to being taken by surprise when writing his own novels.

Talking about *On Chesil Beach*, he said he didn't know the novel would have its unique ending when he started. "Part of the pleasure of composition is the element of surprise."

His talk ended on an optimistic note.

When asked by an audience member whether the novel can survive in the social media world of today where people have increasingly short attention spans glued to their tablets and iPhones he responded with a resounding "Yes!"

"How much we can hold in short-term memory is not changed by Facebook folk. I think it's biological, not functional. Almost 40 percent of our neural processing is linked to the visual and literature is visual. So our world is drenched in the visual and we shouldn't worry about our attention span."

Hopefully he will be proven right in time for publication of his next novel, which he is currently writing. "It's a science fiction novel set in the past." Nothing less interesting and experimental

could be expected of the celebrated Whitbread and Man Booker Prize winner.

Banny Hay

### Brexit... what's next?

Sunday politics

EARLY on Sunday morning Ian McEwan and Geordie Grieg, after talk of books, sex and interviews, covered Brexit. McEwan and Grieg are both great lovers of the EU, so they were content in their Remainer dismay.

After lunch there was Michael Gove MP and BBC News chief James Harding talking about politics, Trump and the BBC.

"Shy bairns get no sweeties," was Gove's comment on his Times interview with Donald Trump — Trump being "a raging, remarkable force of nature" who answered cultural questions with cultural answers.

Turning to the UK, Gove admitted Jeremy Corbyn had "a degree of positivity and energy". In answer to the one-word question "Boris?" Gove responded: "Yes is the short answer."

Gove then asked Harding: "How true to life is *W1A*?" To which the answer was "I've seen relatively few because it is too painful — it is very well observed."

Next up was a panel discussion chaired by the *Daily Mail* columnist Sarah Vine (aka Mrs Gove). In the week Baroness Trumpington announced her retirement from the Upper House aged 95, Vine showed that all is not lost.

Benjamin Wegg-Prosser said he expected Corbyn to be prime minister in the next 24 months thanks to his 30 years of organising and campaigning (NGO campaigns and marginal groups) and a "remarkable on the ground movement".

Kwasi Kwarteng described populism as "an outcome you don't like" and an accusation levelled at something for which one has "no response".

Gove sees the UK as an outlier of the rest of Europe but better insulated, adding: "Politics is downstream of economics and culture."

Kwarteng said he had always expected the current Brexit negotiations to include "standoff, drama, tears".

Gove admitted to having read Neil Strauss's infamous chat-up/courtship book *The Rules of the Game*, with regard to being distant but not too distant in Brexit negotiations, where "earlier [the EU had] seen [Brexit] as a feint and then the centime dropped".

In answer to a question, it emerged that the panel (Wegg-Prosser and Kwarteng) thought Europe would have left us on the periphery regardless of Brexit, similar to the Ukraine or Turkey, and the huge significance of the UK not having joined the Euro was emphasised.

Gove answered a question by making a comparison of Brexit and the American War of Independence, whereby one group broke away from another administrative body after 150 years.

The Cliveden Literary Festival is back next year on October 6 and 7.

Rodolph De Salis