

WHAT'S ON

Eastbourne Symphony Orchestra join forces for The Dream of Gerontius

Phil Hewitt

After the success of their 2024 Verdi Requiem, the combined forces of the Eastbourne Symphony Orchestra, the ES Chorus, Hailsham Choral and Noteworthy Voices are together again for a performance of Elgar's great choral work *The Dream of Gerontius*, featured recently in the 2025 British historical drama film *The Choral*.

Elgar confided to a friend: "You will find *Gerontius* far beyond anything I've done... I have written my own blood into the score."

The words, a poem written by Cardinal John Henry Newman, tell of the journey of a man's soul from judgment to purgatory. Sir John Barbirolli, one of the greatest interpreters of the work,

described it as "a work, exulting and exalted, written as only masterpieces can be, in a constant heat of inspiration." *Gerontius* is, in the words of one of Elgar's biographers, Michael Kennedy, "a spiritual and artistic experience."

Conductor Graham Jones, the ESO's musical director since its inception and now conducting his 135th concert, said: "This is our fourth performance of *Gerontius* which has a special place in the lives of those who know it. As always in the presence of great art, one feels a sense of humility in approaching the work. It is a privilege to conduct it, even more so as this performance, again in St Saviour's Church, Eastbourne, is in a setting appropriate to the work, as was

our performance in 1999 in Chichester Cathedral when mezzo soprano Sarah Connolly (now Dame Sarah) sang the part of the Angel."

For their 2026 concert, bass Jozik Kotz, Hailsham Choral's musical director, is the High Priest and Angel of Agony, and tenor Andrew Mackenzie-Wicks takes on the role of *Gerontius*. They have both performed several times with conductor Graham Jones.

Graham added: "Rebecca Hughes, who sings the part of the Angel, also sang with us in 2024 and this familiarity with the soloists makes the whole experience much more enjoyable."

Before the start of their careers, Rebecca studied vocal performance and opera at Birmingham Conserva-

toire and at Trinity College London and Jozik read music at the University of York and was a lay clerk in York Minster followed by a post-graduate scholarship at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Andrew was a chorister at Chichester Cathedral and a music scholar at Eastbourne College, then studied at Durham University followed by the Royal Northern College of Music.

ESO concert manager John Thornley added: "This event is a collaboration of musical groups with some 130 singers from choirs from the local area and further afield, and some 60 players. For some, rehearsals started in January, and all singers have come together in recent weeks while the players rehearse separately. They will



Forces will combine for *The Dream of Gerontius* (contributed pic)

all be joined for the final rehearsal on concert day by the three soloists, a fine example of collaborative music-making for the enjoyment of the performers and those who come to listen. We had a sell-out concert last time so we encourage those who want to join us to get their tickets." Tickets are available in advance (£18) from WeGot-

Tickets and from (cash only) Rager and Roberts, 36 Cornfield Road, Eastbourne BN21 4QH and 117 Green Street, Eastbourne BN21 1RS, and also on the door (£20).

The concert takes place on Sunday, April 26 at 7.30pm in St Saviour's Church, Eastbourne, BN21 4UT. More information from www.eso.org.uk.