

April
PREVIEW



A tribute to Woody Guthrie.

CREWKERNE

REG MeROSS, the Crewkerne-based singer-songwriter whose work has always championed the issues of the day, from homelessness to the climate crisis, is a 21st century protest singer—and his latest project channels perhaps the greatest protest singer of all, Woody Guthrie.

Commissioned by and produced by Pete Townshend (of The Who, for those who don't know the name) *Fire and Dust*, released in mid-March, tells Woody's story with passion, wit and a deep empathy with one of America's finest folk musicians.

The album, which features some of Woody Guthrie's best-known songs—including *Deportee* and *This Land is Your Land*—showcases Reg MeROSS's wide-ranging skill as a song-writer, singer and musician.

When Townshend called Reg to suggest the idea he saw how the project would “draw a direct line from Woody, through Bob Dylan, to Reg MeROSS” and pledged his full support to realise this vision both as a studio album (which he co-produced and played on) and a series of live tours across the UK and beyond.

Highlighting racism, bigotry, corruption and inequality of Woody's time—and every bit as relevant today, particularly in the US—the song-cycle is focused on the life and times of a man who lived through and told the story of Dust Bowl America.

There isn't a weak track on the album, but stand-out songs include the title track, *Fire and Dust*, the wry ballad, *I sent for a wife*, the heartfelt *Fit for Work* and the final powerful song, *The Gypsy Singer*.

Pete Townshend says: “Reg's terrific songs tell Woody's life story with respect and affection, but also truth.”



*Sophy Roberts, whose new book *A Training School for Elephants* was published in March will talk at this year's Sherborne Travel Writing Festival*

WEST DORSET-based journalist and travel writer Sophy Roberts headlines the Saturday night lineup of speakers at this year's Sherborne Travel Writing Festival. Following on from her book, *The Lost Pianos of Siberia*, she has brought history to life again with her new book, *A Training School For Elephants*. Already a Sunday Times bestseller, the book weaves together history and reportage to tell a story of folly and colonial greed.

In 1879, King Leopold II of Belgium commissioned the charismatic Irish adventurer Frederick Carter to ship four tamed Asian elephants from India to the East African coast, where they were marched inland towards Congo. The ultimate aim was to establish a training school for African elephants.

Following in the footsteps of the four elephants, Sophy pieces together the story of this long-forgotten expedition, in travels that take her to Belgium, Iraq, India, Tanzania and Congo. The storytelling brings to life a compelling cast of historic characters and modern voices, from ivory dealers to Catholic nuns, set against rich descriptions of the landscapes travelled. The author digs deep into historic records

to reckon with our broken relationship with animals, revealing an extraordinary—and enduring—story of colonial greed, ineptitude, hypocrisy and folly. She will talk about the book on Saturday 12th April at 7pm at the Sherborne Travel Writing Festival.

Travel writing takes us to places that can be exotic or intimately familiar, imaginary, historical or terrifying. For around 2,000 years, travellers have delighted, amazed and dazzled their readers with their adventures. This year, Sherborne's Travel Writing Festival, from 11th to 13th April, will take audiences from the glittering Mughal court into the mental health system, from beautiful Greek islands to the fascinating but often bloody history of North Africa and Islam.

Join Mevan Babakar, Alexander Christie-Miller, Horatio Clare, Nandini Das, Alan Edwards, Xiaolu Guo, Rosie Goldsmith, Victoria Hislop, Kapka Kassabova, Jonathan Lorie, Ann Morgan, Sophy Roberts, Barnaby Rogerson and Rory MacLean for an unforgettable weekend.

For full details pick up a festival leaflet or visit sherbornetravelwritingfestival.com.



[The gravedigger's story.](#)

DORCHESTER

POSSIBLY the best-known gravedigger in all literature (maybe the only one that most people remember) provides the inspiration for the surreal clowning skills of Ridiculusmus, who bring their show, *Alas Poor Yorick* to Dorchester Arts at the Corn Exchange, on Friday 11th April at 7.30pm.

Hamlet uses the discovery in the newly dug grave of the clown's skull to riff on life, death and decay—Ridiculusmus look through the eyes of the men digging Ophelia's grave for an excavation of work and political systems.

Alas! Poor Yorick draws variously on popular culture and various radical writers to present a relentless critique of our institutional failings, hypocritical cultural mores and political inadequacies, all wrapped up in a largely silent clown show.

Mashing up the serious with the silly in trademark style, Ridiculusmus meld their formative influences—The Two Ronnies, Samuel Beckett and the absurdist film director Roy Anderson—with Shakespeare's original text.

The show is described as a Stoppardian homage that metaphorically explores work, political systems and religion in an hour of slapstick, the original text and a new spin on 400-year-old jokes.

DOF anniversary.

BRYANSTON

DORSET Opera Festival this year celebrates its 20th anniversary at Bryanston School's Coade Hall, following the move to Blandford from the original base at Sherborne School.

The festival will run from 22nd to 26th July, and will include two formal dinners in Bryanston House. The thrilling opera programme features Verdi's cruel but musically glorious *Rigoletto*, a bloody drama of sex and revenge, and a double bill of Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticata* and Puccini's *Suor Angelica*.

Last year Dorset Opera Festival marked its golden jubilee, 50th anniversary, with a programme which included a new opera commission, based on Thomas Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree*, and a triumphant production of *Madama Butterfly*.

This year, once again, says artistic director Roderick Kennedy, "we are pulling out all the stops to bring you an exciting programme, involving some of our favourite composers, whose works have enthralled our audiences over the years."

For full details of the programme, booking arrangements and the anniversary dinners, visit dorsetopera.com

Accordion-saxophone duo.

CONCERTS IN THE WEST



Mikeleiz-Zucchi Duo touring in April

AN unusual duo of Canadian saxophonist David Zucchi and Spanish accordionist Inigo Mikeleiz-Berrada come to Dorset and Somerset on Friday 11th April and Saturday 12th for the next Concerts in the West programme.

The London-based Mikeleiz-Zucchi Duo have won a number of awards including the Royal Overseas League Annual Music Competition's Mixed Ensemble Prize and are City Music Foundation Artists.

Their repertoire spans everything from reimagined traditional works to contemporary compositions

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and improvisation, all vividly rendered by the unique combination of saxophone and accordion.

After their debut concert at the Vale de Cambra Classical Music Festival (Portugal) in 2019, they have performed across the UK and Europe, including appearances at Wigmore Hall, Edinburgh Fringe, St Martin-in-the-Fields, Buxton International Festival, the Rosengart Museum (Lucerne), and St. George's Bristol.

They have appeared on BBC Radio 3's *In Tune* and were 2023 residents at Music at Brel (Roquecor, France). The duo is dedicated to the generation of new repertoire for their instrumentation. Individually, Iñigo and David have distinguished themselves as award-winning interpreters of classical, improvised, contemporary and experimental music.

There are three concerts, at Bridport Arts Centre for the usual coffee concert at 11.30am on Friday 11th, Ilminster Arts Centre that evening at 7.30pm and Saturday 12th at Crewkerne Dance House at 7.30pm. The programme includes their arrangement of Granados' *12 Spanish Dances*, Aileen Sweeney's *Mirrie Dancers*, their arrangement of Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Alex Paxton's *Water Butt: Lovers, Snorkel* and Bartók's *Dance Suite* (arr. MZ Duo).

The Salt Path

POOLE

GILLIAN Anderson and Jason Isaacs star in a new film adaptation of Raynor Winn's best-selling memoir *The Salt Path*. The film will open at Poole's Lighthouse arts centre as part of its national release on Friday 30th May.

The film tells the story of how Raynor and her

husband Moth, following his terminal diagnosis and the devastating loss of their home, embarked on a 630-mile walking journey along the South West Coast Path from Minehead to Poole. With just £115 and a tent, they make their way through heartbreak and healing, discovering the redemptive power of nature and human resilience.

The book, which sold more than a million copies, explores themes around the meaning of home and grief, which struck a chord with readers. It has also inspired both a folk music tour, with Raynor joining Gigsanner to perform *Saltlines*, and this high profile film adaptation, much of which was made on location in Cornwall, Devon and Dorset.

Talking politics and living dangerously.

LYME REGIS

JOHN Crace, The Guardian's caustic and very funny political sketch-writer, comes to the Marine Theatre at Lyme Regis on Friday 18th April for a talk entitled *What The Hell Just Happened?* He is followed a few days later by another top journalist, the Sunday Times' Christina Lamb, talking about her *Years of Living Dangerously*, on Wednesday 23rd; both talks are at 8pm.

The last 10 years of British politics have been one long psychodrama, with the Scottish referendum, David Cameron's surprise election win, Brexit, Theresa May. Boris Johnson, Liz Truss, Rishi Sunak ... Each prime minister worse than the last. Covid. Partygate. The UK's politicians have rarely looked so clueless, according to Crace. Even with the new Labour government we are still rushing through several news cycles each day. With a ringside seat at



Gillian Anderson and Jason Isaacs as Raynor and Moth in *The Salt Path*



Quimantu perform a series of concerts around the county in April

all the main events, John Crace should provide an evening of high comedy as he tries to make sense of it all.

Find out what the Queen's last words to Liz Truss really were. This might just be the best therapy session you've ever had.

Christina Lamb, chief foreign correspondent of *The Sunday Times*, is also the bestselling author of *I am Malala* and *The Girl From Aleppo*. Her work is defined by a determination to vividly convey life in areas of danger and conflict.

How else would the rest of us know about the injustice, the violence, but also the hope that can be found in those dark places?

[From Chile to Covent Garden](#) [BLANDFORD AND CERNE ABBAS](#)

ARTSREACH, Dorset's rural touring arts charity, is working on a unique collaboration with the Anglo-Chilean band Quimantú and community singers from several Dorset choirs to perform *Misa de los Mineros*,

The Miners' Mass, in a series of concerts across the county, starting in April.

The first Dorset concert takes place in Blandford Parish Church on Friday 4th April and features the singers of Palida Choir and Shaftesbury School Choir. The concert's second half will feature music from Quimantu's charismatic repertoire of Latin American and world music alongside songs from Palida Choir, led by Karen Wimhurst.

A concert in Cerne Abbas on Sunday 11th May will be the final event of the Cerne Giant Festival. Specially programmed repertoire for the second half will reflect the festival's celebration of "humanity in the landscape" and will feature songs from *Cloud 9 Chorus*, led by Kathie Prince.

The Dorset part of the project culminates with a concert at The Exchange in Sturminster Newton on Sunday 15th June with more than 80 singers from all participating Dorset choirs taking to the stage alongside Quimantu.

The musical journey reaches its finale in two



Top Six at the Flix

From Page to Screen, Film Festival.

'American Fictions is therefore my theme for *From Page to Screen* 2025. It will be a journey that takes in stories of rugged individuals, of the American dream and corporate dystopia, of politics and power, but also of alternative narratives, gentler and more subtle. We might not fully get to the bottom of things, but let's unpack the box and throw things around a little and of course, watch some great films adapted from great American writing.' Andrew Chater *From Page To Screen* Curator 2025.

The Grapes of Wrath (1940)

The Grapes of Wrath was often named the greatest American film. Roger Ebert. Roger Ebert.

The Day of The Locust (1975)

'...every bit as powerful as any movie on the movie industry out there and, in my opinion, conveys the themes and metaphors of the book in exactly the right tone.' George Ferrara. TCM.

The Ice Storm (1997)

Lee daringly chooses to keep his story's motivational mysteries unexplained, leaving this richly observed film open to the viewer's assessments. Janet Maslin. The New York Times.

Winter's Bone (2010)

Director Debra Granik handles this volatile, borderline horrific material with unblinking ferocity and feeling. *Winter's Bone* is unforgettable. It means to shake you and does. Peter Travers. Rolling Stone.

The Apprentice (2024)

Some will argue that Stan's performance in the central role is a touch too likeable, but the actor does an excellent job, going beyond impersonation to capture the essence of the man. David Rooney, The Hollywood Reporter.

The Age of Innocence (1993)

A beautifully done adaptation of the novel, polished, elegant and completely cinematic. Kenneth Turan. Los Angeles Times.

major concerts during Refugee Week 2025, at St Paul's Church in Covent Garden.

[Music at the Marine.](#)

LYME REGIS

FROM the Dub Pistols to Swing From Paris, April music at the Marine offers the venue's usual eclectic mix of great world music, jazz, folk and fusions.

The Dub Pistols, on Friday 4th, create a riotous collision of drum and bass, hip-hop, ska, dub and punk.

The well-travelled head of Jungle Cakes records, Ed Solo headlines a night off DJs playing breaks, drum and bass and party tunes on Friday 11th. The following night, Buena Bristol Social Club, a collaboration of Cuban and Bristol-based musicians, recreate the sound and flavour of the great Buena Vista Social Club.

On Thursday 24th, Henge promise (threaten?) to take the audience out of this world ... "so that eventually your species may put an end to war and set up new homes in space."

Folk trio The Young'uns celebrate 20 years of singing together at the Marine on Friday 25th, and the month's music ends with Swing From Paris, a Cotswold-based gypsy jazz quartet of violin, two guitars and double bass, on Sunday 27th.

[Stories in the Dust.](#)

DORCHESTER

CHILDREN aged five to 12 years are invited to take an exciting journey into a strange land with Anna Harriott and Iona Johnson, when they visit Dorchester Arts to perform *Stories In the Dust*, on Wednesday 9th April at the Corn Exchange at 2pm.

Two intrepid explorers travel across a mysterious landscape. They're full of ideas and full of hope ... but dangerously low on baked beans ...

As they journey across this unknown country in a contraption they've built themselves, they sing, play games and tell stories inspired by a collection of precious things they've gathered from a time gone by.

With live music and puppetry, *Stories in the Dust* is a funny, heartfelt and hopeful eco-fable that takes you to another world—where an ancient book guides your way, a drop of rain changes everything and a mighty lion holds its secrets in an old clay pot.

[Blues roots with Phil Beer.](#)

BRIDPORT

MULTI-instrumental folk star Phil Beer is coming to the Electric Palace at Bridport on Saturday 19th April at 8pm, sharing the blues roots of his musical life.

Phil, one half of the West Country's famous duo Show of Hands, will be supported by his long-time collaborator Miranda Sykes on bass guitar and Sian Monaghan on percussion. The trio will guide the audience through the music of some of the great names in blues, including Blind Willie Johnson, the Rev Gary Davis, Davy Graham and John Mayall.

Phil will introduce the music of the Great British Blues interpreters and pioneers, while giving it that inimitable Phil Beer "twist".

The Phil Beer Trio's Blues and Beyond tour promises three great musicians at the top of their game, combining effortlessly to create an evening of songs and random anecdotes from an extraordinary life in music, this time from the "bluesy side of the street".

Down the rabbit hole

BRIDPORT

IF you think you know *Alice in Wonderland*, you are in for a delightful musical surprise at Bridport Arts Centre on Friday 4th April, at 7.30pm, when Platform 4 come to town.

A gig theatre journey ... for the curious ... and the curiouser, Platform 4's *The Alice Project* brings this classic tale to the stage with a wonderland of amazing live music.

Who are you? asks the Caterpillar. Alice is not sure...

This remarkable collision of live music, text and rich visual imagery takes the audience into the world of *Alice in Wonderland* but through a very different lens. Platform 4 has created a sonic journey through Wonderland, weaving together original music, Lewis Carroll's text and voices from 40 contemporary Alices!

This extraordinary show also features interviews exploring transformation, identity and growing older. This is a riff, a homage and an audio adventure down the rabbit hole, with a four-piece band of multi-instrumentalist performers. Expect twisting melodies, smiling cats, tearful mock turtles and percussive teacups.

Puffling Percy

DORCHESTER

MEET Percy, the very appealing star of his own show, coming to Dorchester Arts at the Corn Exchange, on Wednesday 16th April at 2pm.

Percy is a puffling who loves his burrow a little too much. What he doesn't realise, however, is that his entire flock are about to migrate south for the winter. If he doesn't learn to fly, he will be left behind and his life will be in mortal danger! Can fearless field-mouse Shrimp make Percy feel braver?

This Norwich Puppet Theatre show is a heartwarming children's story about friendship, overcoming self-doubt and trusting your own instincts. With original music and songs and magical puppetry, *Puffling Percy* will shake you by your tail-feathers and lift you up, up and away!

Hated by teachers, loved by children

HONITON

ENID Blyton was a best-selling author whose works were excoriated by critics, banned by the BBC and hated by teachers and librarians. But what was she really like? Liz Grand portrays this controversial figure in *The Secret Life of Enid Blyton*, a play by Kit Hunter, coming to the Beehive Centre at Honiton on Saturday 12th April at 7.30pm.

Virtually everybody of a certain age has read an Enid Blyton book. She was loved by children (except her younger daughter who hated her) but vilified by the arbiters of children's reading matter.

She sold more than 600 million books, despite all her work being banned by the BBC and many libraries and schools for more than 30 years. She was accused of being a racist and of using such limited vocabulary that it actually hindered children's reading progress.

Her love-life was interesting and she had numerous affairs including with her children's nanny. She enjoyed playing golf so much that she bought a golf course near Swanage. She died of Alzheimer's in 1968 aged 71, mourned by millions of readers all over the world.

The play is presented by On A Role Theatre Company. Liz Grand's previous shows with On A Role include *The Second Best Bed*, *Where Is Mrs. Christie?* and *Mrs. Churchill: My life With Winston*.

GPW

The Young Lit Fix



Wolf Siren

By Beth O'Brien

Cover illustration Ayesha L. Rubio
HarperCollins Children's Books

Paperback £7.99

Reviewed by Nicky Mathewson

In a village surrounded by walls to keep the villagers safe from the woods, a small girl, Red, is harbouring a secret. Everyone knows that the woods are dangerous because of the wolves that live there. The village used to be protected by wolf hunters, men with crossbows, but the wolves started to fight back and now the villagers live in fear, sending only women to the woods with strict instructions not to linger.

What the villagers don't know is that Red can communicate with the trees, the trees know her and she visits them often. She is partially sighted and the trees help her find her way through the woods. She can't keep sneaking around forever, and when a terrible secret threatens to tear her family apart, and in turn the village, Red has to summon all her strength and trust in nature to help her find the right path.

A gorgeous and evocative debut novel which shows how fear can drive humans to act cruelly and how the natural world should be nurtured and respected. Led by an empowered disabled character, this is a modern fable that I could not put down. Perfect for readers age 12 and up.

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