



The Jane Austen Fan Club is at Bridport Arts Centre in February

Celebrating William Barnes' 225th Birthday STURMINSTER NEWTON

UP and down the country, there are jolly events to mark the birthday of Robert Burns—but Dorset has its own special event, which celebrates the works of dialect poet, William Barnes. This year the party, at Sturminster Exchange on Sunday 22nd February, coincides with what would be Barnes' 225th birthday.

For the past nine years, Artsreach and The Ridgeway Singers and Band have marked the Dorset polymath's birthday with *Tea with William Barnes*, an afternoon of poetry, music, song and Dorset food.

Born in Bagber in 1801, William Barnes attended school in Sturminster Newton. A scholar, linguist, poet, artist, priest and inventor, Barnes wrote more than 800 poems in the Dorset dialect. He also relished the country dances, folksongs and carols of the county and often wrote about them in his work.

Alongside a delicious cream tea, The Ridgeway Singers and Band, led by Phil Humphries with Tim Laycock, historian, folk musician and vice-president of The William Barnes Society, will perform folksongs and dance tunes from across the county. The programme this year will include *One Night as I Lay on my Bed*, collected in 1906 by the Hammond brothers from George House of Beaminster, *Away Dark Thoughts* from Winterborne Monkton, and *The New Rigged Ship* and *The Young May Moon* from the Hardy family manuscripts.

This year's programme also includes a musical setting of Barnes' poem *Rustic Childhood*. Recitals of some of Barnes' much-loved poems will keep alive the rich dialect of Dorset in this wonderful celebration of this life. *Tea with William Barnes* begins at 3pm.

Artsreach is also delighted to be partnering with The Exchange to host a pop-up producers and makers market on the day, offering the chance to try some famous local produce or discover something new and made with love in Dorset. The market is open to the general public from 11am to 3pm.

It is a truth universally acknowledged BRIDPORT AND TOURING

... that we all love Jane Austen (well, most of us do), but best friends Charlotte and Ellie are superfans and they want you to join them at their exclusive *Jane Austen Fan Club* at Bridport Arts Centre on Saturday 7th February.

Hilarious and heartfelt, *The Jane Austen Fan Club* promises high drama, breathless romance and dancing of the highest quality*. Alongside the usual books, bonnets and biscuits, you can expect comedy, chaos and a lifesize cardboard Colin Firth. But as real life inconveniently intrudes on the meeting, Charlotte and Ellie are faced with the question—in 250 years, how much have things really changed?

Performers Victoria Briggs, who is based in Salisbury, and Lucy Mellors, based in Southampton, are taking their hilarious and deeply loving Jane Austen show on tour, with dates at arts centres and libraries around the region, including at the Palace Court Theatre in Bournemouth, on Thursday 12th February. * This is a somewhat optimistic promise—dancing, anyway.

Masterclass with Alison Steadman POOLE

ALISON Steadman, one of the best-loved and most versatile actresses of her generation, will be the special guest at the Pipeline masterclass at Poole's Lighthouse arts centre on Wednesday 11th February.

Acclaimed for her stage, television and film roles, Alison first came to prominence in television plays *Nuts in May* and *Abigail's Party*—she had originated the role of the monstrous Beverly on stage. She received BAFTA nominations for her roles in *The Singing Detective* and *Fat Friends*, and also made memorable television appearances in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Gavin & Stacey*. On stage, she has worked at the Royal Court, Hampstead, Nottingham Playhouse, Theatre Royal Bath and the National Theatre.

The Pipeline masterclasses are open to anyone interested in new work, what actors do and how they do it, and the art of bringing life to characters. The February event also provided an opportunity to ask questions of one of the country's most celebrated actresses. The sessions are free, but donations are welcome to support the development of new work.

Pipeline is run by Lighthouse Poole in association with Dorset Scriptwriters. Tickets for the masterclass with Alison Steadman can be booked at <https://www.lighthousepoole.co.uk>, or on 01202 280000.

The mysterious woman returns LYME REGIS

LYME Regis has two major literary connections—one is Jane Austen's *Persuasion* and the other is John Fowles and his best-known novel, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Austen's last completed novel had an anniversary production at the Marine Theatre last year, and this year, from 11th to 14th February, the mysterious cloaked woman returns in a new play.



Alison Steadman is a special guest at The Lighthouse in Poole in February

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*Our Little Hour tells
the inspirational story
of Walter Tull*

The production of Fowles' novel, famously filmed with Meryl Streep and Jeremy Irons, has been adapted by Mark Healy, who also adapted the version of Persuasion that was staged last year.

The new stage version brings the complexities of Fowles' ideas to life, almost 60 years after the original novel was published.

Set mostly in Lyme itself, this is a tragic story of unsuitable love in respectable Victorian Britain. The audience is given access to the inner workings of the original novel by the writer who, like a puppet-master, manipulates characters and plot as the story unfolds.

Director Chris Gill has worked closely with Mark Healy, supported by the Fowles Trust, to create this adaptation especially for the Marine Theatre.

Readers may know that John Fowles lived in Lyme Regis from 1965 until his death in 2005. For most of that period he lived at a handsome house, Belmont, which is now owned by the Landmark Trust, who

restored it to its original 18th century form, with Victorian additions removed.

[Campaign to honour Walter Tull](#) **DORCHESTER AND TOURING**

A NEW musical based on the life of the late, great Walter Tull, a pioneering black footballer and courageous army officer, is coming to Exeter's Barnfield Theatre on 17th and 18th February, and to Dorchester and Poole as part of a national tour.

Commissioned by Show Racism the Red Card, the show is part of a national campaign to address a century-old injustice that has denied Britain's first black British army officer the award of the Military Cross for which he was recommended during the First World War.

Our Little Hour tells the inspirational story of Walter Tull, the first black footballer to play at the highest level of the domestic game in the UK. He went on

to achieve another historic breakthrough as the first man of his heritage to be commissioned as an officer in the British Army. His appointment in 1917 came despite an official ruling made just three years before that all British army officers should be of “pure European descent”.

Leon Newman, who plays Tull, says the play is not only an artistic celebration of Walter Tull’s life: “It is also part of an active mission to persuade the British government to honour the award of the Military Cross for which Walter was recommended following his courage and leadership during a mission which took place on January 1st 1918 when he led a party of 26 men as part of a raid across the Piave River in Northern Italy.”

Walter Tull’s party had to shield the rest of the battalion involved in the raid and provide cover as they crossed multiple streams and advanced on enemy lines. The raid was a complete success and Walter returned with all 26 of his men safe and unharmed. As a consequence he received a citation for “gallantry and coolness” under fire from Major-General Sydney Lawford, Commander of the 41st Division of the British Army.

For some inexplicable reason the award has never been made. Playwright Dougie Blaxland has placed Tull’s role in the raid across the Piave River at the very centre of the drama. He argues that “the failure to honour Walter Tull with the award he so clearly deserved is made all the more disgraceful by the fact that he was killed just three months later fighting in Northern France.”

Director Amanda Horlock describes *Our Little Hour* as “a celebration of the life of an extraordinary man whose pioneering spirit continues to inspire the campaign for justice and equality. This production honours the memory of one of the most significant figures in British sporting and military history.”

Paul Kearns, who is director of operations at Show Racism the Red Card, believes that the production “tells a really important story which will help to reinforce the work that we are doing to combat racism by engaging new audiences in a celebration of Walter Tull’s pioneering contribution to British society.”

To date more than 3000 people have signed up in support of the campaign. But in the words of Dougie Blaxland: “We still have a long way to go to reach the 10,000 signatures needed for a formal response from the government, but we hope audiences will be moved to support us when they have heard the great man’s extraordinary story”.

More details of the campaign to honour Walter Tull can be found via the following link:

<https://www.change.org/p/honour-walter-tull-by-awarding-him-the-military-cross-and-by-erecting-a-statue-in-london>

Our Little Hour is at the Barnfield Theatre, Exeter, on 17th and 18th February, the Redgrave Theatre at Bristol on 10th March, Poole Lighthouse on 11th March and Dorchester Arts at the Corn Exchange on 12th March.

Fantastic fun for families HALF-TERM



Yara in the Wild Wood comes to Cerne Abbas in February

FROM Book Witches to Viking gods and adventures in the woods, Artsreach has a host of fun and entertainment for children of all ages over the February half term, from Sunday 15th to Saturday 21st, with live music, magical puppetry and more.

Front Room WSM comes to Dorset with *Yara in the Wild Wood*, a charming story with captivating puppetry, non-verbal storytelling and spellbinding original folk music.

Yara lives wild and free in the woods, but there’s more to these woods than the trees. This is an endearing tale of growing up, getting wiser and making unexpected friends—come into the woods and explore your wild side in East Stour at 2pm on Sunday 15th February, Hinton Martell at 11am on Tuesday 17th and Cerne Abbas at 2pm on Wednesday 18th.

Coppice Theatre needs help hunting book witches in an enchanting show that celebrates libraries, storytelling and imagination. Kira loves reading, and visiting the library to find a new book is her favourite thing, until one day the words in the books start disappearing and the adults get grumpy.

With her new friend, the book worm, Kira has to uncover why words are vanishing and where these book monsters have come from! Could there be a Book Witch in the library? With live music and puppetry, *How to Catch a Book Witch* also includes key word signing and integrated captions. Join Coppice Theatre in Child Okeford at 11am on Wednesday 18th February, and Litton Cheney at 10.30 on Thursday 19th. After each performance there is also

the opportunity to take part in a creative workshop and make your own book witch!

Finally, join skilled storytellers, Ulf and Odd, for a comedic romp through a whole host of ancient Nordic tales and the world of Viking gods in *The Misadventures of Thor*. Thor is tall, brave and strong, but not too bright! His days are not always full of heroic thunder, but instead are filled with hapless blunder! Like the day he was almost married to an oafish giant or when he thought he was short-changed as the golden presents were handed out.

Rattlebox and Angel Heart Theatre present a new family show, full of their usual blend of puppetry, storytelling and larger-than-life characters. Catch them in Sturminster Newton at 10.30am on 19th February, Broadwindsor at 2pm on 20th and Sixpenny Handley at 11am on 21st.

For more information on these half-term shows, visit www.artsreach.co.uk

Hollywood at the Corn Exchange **DORCHESTER**

WEST End stars Lisa Pulman and Joe Stilgoe bring movie musical magic to Dorchester Corn Exchange with their new show *Hooray for Hollywood*, on Tuesday 3rd February at 7.30pm

The two versatile and popular performers have put together a delightful mix of some of the best-loved songs of our movie-musical lives and it's coming to the Corn Exchange, ahead of a major UK tour.

From *The Wizard of Oz* to *Wicked*, *West Side Story* to *La La Land*, this joyful celebration pays tribute to the Hollywood musicals that have captured hearts for nearly a century. Dorchester audiences are being offered an exclusive chance to see the show while it is still being fine-tuned before its major UK tour.

So bring your popcorn, sit back, and let Pulman and Stilgoe transport you through the golden age and modern classics of movie musicals in a feel-good night of music—just what you need to treat yourself in February!

An adopted life **TOURING**

PERFORMER Luke Wright has taken his real-life story of adoption and turned it into a show that is part stand-up and part poetry, coming to Dorset in February for three dates with Artsreach, Friday 13th at Chetnole village hall, Saturday 14th at the Mowlem in Swanage and Sunday 15th at Ibberton village hall.

Later Life Letter is an evening of warm and honest thoughts, with poems, jokes and some music, as he shares the story of the life he leads and the one he might have done ...

What's it like to stumble across your birth mother

on Facebook? How do you honour the parents who have raised you while satisfying a curiosity about where you came from? Is it telling that you married a social worker?

The show combines the wit, pathos, and silliness that has made him one of England's most popular live poets. This is a frank account of what it means to be someone's child told by a performer who really knows what he's doing. Expect raucous laughter, tear-stained cheeks and a smattering of drum 'n' bass.

The regular tour support act for Dr John Cooper Clarke, Luke Wright also appears regularly on Radio 4, and has won a Fringe First for writing, and a Stage Award for performance.

Other regional dates on the tour include 23rd April at Salisbury Arts Centre and 25th April at Poole Lighthouse.

An evening of piano mastery **SHERBORNE**

DORCHESTER Arts collaborates with Sherborne Girls School to present an exciting evening of piano virtuosity, on Friday 6th February at 7pm, when two of the most gifted young pianists of our time, Martin James Bartlett and Mariam Batsashvili give a programme of piano duets at Gransden Hall in the school's Merritt Centre.

Franz Liszt Competition winner Mariam Batsashvili and 2014 Young Musician of the Year Martin James Bartlett will be performing together in the first of only two performances—the other is at London's Wigmore Hall.

These two remarkable young pianists both have a breathtaking expressive range and the programme has been arranged to include some of the most exquisite works ever written for piano duo. It includes luminous Bach arrangements, the lyricism of Schubert and the sparkling mastery of Mozart, as well as Debussy's charm, Tailleferre's elegance, Ravel's vibrant colours, and Lutoslawski's virtuosity.

From Elvis tribute to 007 **VILLAGES**

SPITZ & Co, the comedy and physical theatre company who have been entertaining Artsreach audiences for some years, are back with Dorset's rural touring arts charity in February with a new, action-packed comedy full of diabolical villains, Bond girls, car chases and music. *The Spy Who Loved Me Tender* will be at Wootten Fitzpaine village hall on Thursday 12th February, Sturminster Marshall hall on Friday 13th and Briantspuddle on Saturday 14th, all starting at 7.30pm.

The inimitable Spitz & Co, creators of Elvis in *Blue Hawaii*, *Glorilla*, *Gloriator* and *Les Gloriables*, are back



VRi sheds new light on a vibrant folk tradition in February

with a show filled with songs, sequins and drama galore, promising the audience that they will be shaken, stirred and left in stitches.

Fresh from winning Best Elvis Tribute Act (aged 55+) Southwest Region 2025, Elvis impersonator Ian Pollock is dreaming bigger and bolder than ever. His new mission? To write and star in a genre-busting, hip-shaking blockbuster James Bond musical ... with Bond played by Elvis! Aided by his ever-loyal tour manager Josephine, and with a little audience back-up, Ian takes us on a globe-trotting escapade full of diabolical villains, Bond girls, car chases, iconic songs, and plenty of bling!

Celebrating Welsh traditions

BURTON BRADSTOCK AND VILLAGES

AN award-winning Welsh trio comes to Burton Bradstock on Sunday 8th February, the last of three dates with Artsreach, Dorset's rural touring arts charity. World-famous actor and champion of all things Welsh, Michael Sheen says: "VRi is where Welsh craft and heart meet."

Twice winners of Best Album at the Welsh Folk Awards, VRi are Jordan Price Williams (cello, voice), Aneirin Jones (violin, voice) and Patrick Rimes (viola, violin, voice). *Songlines*, the magazine for folk,

traditional and ethnic music traditions, says: "They play—and sing—with the exuberance of a folk band, but possess the exquisite musicality and elegance of a chamber string ensemble."

Inspired by the history of a time when Wales' traditional music and dance were suppressed by Methodist chapels and, earlier, its language by the Act of Union, VRi sheds new light on a vibrant folk tradition. Their music harnesses the raw energy of the fiddle with the finesse of the violin, and the beauty of chamber music with the joy and hedonism of a pub session, all underpinned by powerful vocal harmonies.

VRi will be at Langton Matravers village hall on Friday 6th February and Sturminster Marshall's Memorial Hall on Saturday 7th, both at 7.30pm, and Burton Bradstock hall on Sunday 8th February at 3pm.

Up, up and away!

BRIDPORT

BRIDPORT Pantomime Players will take the audience up into the clouds from 4th to 7th February as they stage their 2026 show, *Jack and the Beanstalk* at Bridport Electric Palace. Performances are at 7.30pm with a 1.30 Saturday matinee.

Step into a world of magic, mischief, and towering



Top Six at the Flix

Weymouth Pavilion

2nd February 2026. *Sentimental Value (2025)*. 'On its surface, the film may touch on the familiar theme of how artists draw from their own lives, but Renate Reinsve and Stellan Skarsgard bring incredible tenderness to a story that is ultimately about what children and parents never say to one another—and whether those lifelong silences can ever be broken.' Screen Daily. Tim Grierson.

Cineworld Yeovil

4th February 2026. *Lord of the Rings: The Return Of The King, Extended 2026*. Running Time 4 hours and 39 minutes. 'An epic success and a history-making production that finishes with a masterfully entertaining final installment.' The Hollywood Reporter.

H is For Hawk (2025)

9th February 2026. 'This movie will stay with viewers long after its conclusion as it makes one wholeheartedly believe in the healing power of love and the methods of coping with loss that can make living life tolerable (and possible) again'. Film Book. Thomas Duffy.

In the Mood For Love (2000)

12th February 2026. 'Probably the most breathtakingly gorgeous film of the year, dizzy with a nose-against-the-glass romantic spirit that has been missing from the cinema forever.' The New York Times. A O Scott.

Bridport Arts Centre

14th February 2026. One Day Festival of Music on Film celebrating the greatest concert and music festival films. If I had to choose one of the four great films, it would have to be *Summer of Soul (...or When the Revolution Could Not Be Televised)* (2021).

Bridport Electric Palace

Various Dates. *Hamnet (2025)*. 'Hamnet is devastating, maybe the most emotionally shattering movie I've seen in years.' New York Magazine. Bilge Ebiri.

adventure as our lovable hero, Jack (Hatti Amos) and his brother Simple Simon (Justine Gawen) trade their much-loved family cow for a handful of enchanted beans. Watch in awe as those beans sprout into a colossal beanstalk reaching up into the clouds, leading to a fantastical land above where Giant Buster Gut-Bucket roams and wonders await.

There is side-splitting humour thanks to Dame Dotty Dimple (Jess Goldstone), outlandish characters such as Snatchet (Johannah Leins) and Scarper (Amy Day), and delightful songs that you'll be humming long after the curtain falls.

Expect plenty of audience participation, hilarious antics and magical moments as our hero tackles challenges, outsmarts the Wicked Witch Piccalilli (Amy Carlile) assisted by her apprentice Rancid (James Oldfield) and is helped along the way by Fairy Sugardust (Abbi Irving-Bell).

Jack discovers the true meaning of bravery and friendship, and falls in love with the Princess Charlotte (Ellie Ives) while her caring Mum and Dad, the King and Queen (Teresa Grinter and Pippa Osment) watch on. Humphrey (Alice Scadding) keeps them all in check with his role as The Royal Equerry – or at least tries to.

Liszt and Chopin

CONCERTS IN THE WEST

CONCERTS in the West opens the 2026 series with a recital by the acclaimed young Hungarian-born pianist Daniel Lebhardt. The monthly programme begins on Friday 13th February, with the coffee concert at Bridport Arts Centre at 11.30am, followed by a 7.30pm performance at Ilminster Arts Centre.

The third concert is at Crewkerne Dance House on Saturday 14th at 7.30pm.

Lebhardt, who has a growing reputation internationally, and a CV that already includes performances at major venues, as a soloist and with chamber ensembles, will be performing an exciting programme of solo piano works by Chopin and Liszt.

Romantic dialogues

TINCLETON

PIANO-violin duo Milda Daunoraite and Amber Emson open the 2026 season at the Tincleton Gallery in the Old School House at Tincleton near Dorchester on 13th and 14th February with an evening of romantic musical dialogues—just the right programme for Valentine's Day.

The recitals are the same on both evenings, and include Clara Schumann's lyrical *Three Romances* for violin and piano, Richard Strauss's passionate *violin sonata in E-flat major*, Lili Boulanger's *Nocturne*, Elgar's *Salut d'Amour*, de Falla's *Danse Espagnole* and Brahms' *violin sonata No 3*.

Pianist Milda Daunoraite is studying with Tessa Nicholson at the Royal Academy of Music where she is a recipient of the ABRSM Scholarship award. She has performed at the Wigmore Hall, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Musikhuset Aarhus, United Nations headquarters in Geneva, at the EMMA World Summit of Nobel Prize Laureates in Warsaw and many other eminent events and festivals.

Amber Emson won first prize at the International Competition Hohenpriesnitz and second prize at International Competition Szymon Goldberg. She has performed in venues including Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Berliner Philharmonie, Wigmore Hall, Singapore Victoria Hall, ANAM Quartethaus Melbourne and Rheingau Musikfestival.

Shiver they timbers!

HONITON

BRISTOL moves to Honiton as the town's community theatre company prepares to present its 2026 pantomime, Treasure Island, at the Beehive centre from Tuesday 17th February to Saturday 21st at 7pm, with a Saturday matinee at 2pm.

Writer Ben Crocker has taken the great Robert Louis Stevenson adventure of pirates, deadly danger and buried treasure, starting in a dock-side tavern in Bristol, and created a laugh-out-loud, swashbuckling stage adventure.

This version of *Treasure Island* is a vibrant and comedic reimagining of the story, which retains the core elements of the original—with brave young Jim Hawkins, the charismatic villain Long John Silver and the quest for buried treasure, all infused with traditional panto magic, slapstick humour, audience participation, catchy songs and larger-than-life characters.

Long John Silver may be a dastardly villain, but he's reckoned without the Ladies of the Smuggler's Cove Women's Institute! This is a madcap, laugh-a-minute pirate adventure story!

Second scratch night collaboration

EXETER

EXETER'S Northcott Theatre and Phoenix arts centre are collaborating on a Scratch Night partnership, on Monday 23rd February, to support established and emerging artists and performers across the South West.

Following the huge success of Scratch Night during the 2025 Elevate Festival, the second Scratch Night will take place at Exeter Phoenix auditorium offering artists the opportunity to showcase work in progress in front of a live audience.

Kate Danbury, co-producer of the event, says: “We want to open our doors and meet as many artists as possible. Scratch Nights are a celebration of local talent and, going forward, they will serve as a declaration from Exeter's two leading performance venues that we are here to support artists from the early ideas stage to the big stage.”

For audiences, it is a rare insight into the creative process behind new work while allowing artists to receive valuable audience feedback that could help shape how the final version of the performance may be presented.

The successful applicants receive £150 towards developing their practice, along with access to free rehearsal space at both Exeter Phoenix and the Barnfield Theatre, as well as dramaturgical support from Exeter Northcott Theatre's artist development producer Sam Parker who encourages artists at all stages of their practice to take this opportunity.

GPW

The Young Lit Fix

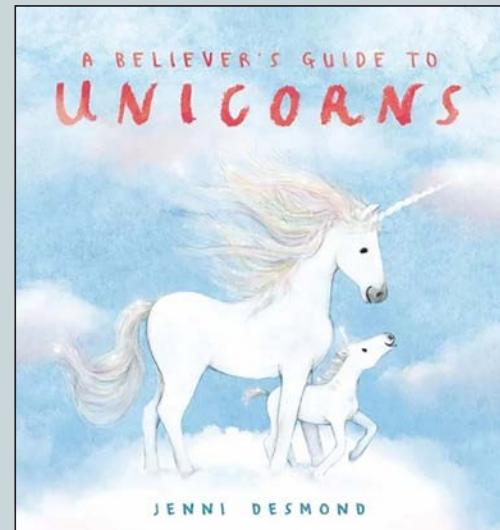
A Believer's Guide to Unicorns

By Jenni Desmond

Published by Hachette Children's Books

Paperback £7.99

Reviewed by Nicky Mathewson



THOUGH a sighting of a unicorn is rare, it's good to know what to look out for and be ready for magic at any time.

This delightful picture book is full of clues of where to look to find them.

Aside from fascinating information about where unicorns live; in the sky, what they like to do for fun; bouncing and jumping, how their emotions are linked with the weather; excitement can result in lightning, there are also, very cleverly, details about types of clouds and weather to help young explorers identify this aspect of nature for themselves.

For example, “Fog is a flat, low cloud, that makes it hard for unicorns to see...Cirrus clouds are made from ice crystals, which are very slippery for unicorns...Cumulonimbus clouds are huge thunderclouds full of energy that make hail, thunder, lightning and unicorn power.”

Beautifully illustrated and engaging, this book embraces kindness, family bonds and friendship and most importantly, magic, which we all need in our lives.

I adore this story come guide book and recommend it for a read aloud for little ones or an independent read for early readers from 7 and up.

10% off for Marshwood Vale readers at The Bookshop on South Street, Bridport. 01308 422964 www.dorsetbooks.com