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## EDITOR'S LETTER

# Hello



As winter's frost blankets our beloved city, I'm thrilled to unveil the latest London Mums magazine. Inside, we've cooked up a delicious stew of fascinating stories that'll tickle your fancy and warm your heart.

Our cover star, Esther Abrami, isn't your grandma's classical musician. She's rewriting the score, making classical music cool for the next generation. Her reimagined film soundtracks serve as a gateway to this timeless genre, captivating young enthusiasts. Esther's journey, from music school prodigy to 'Social Media Superstar' and 'Rising Star,' rivals a Beethoven crescendo.

But wait, there's more! We feature not one, but two musical mamas. Izzy Judd gracefully balances motherhood with a dazzling career as a violin virtuoso. Then there's Deniece Pearson, lead diva of FIVE STAR, still shining after four decades in the music industry. Her latest single, 'Forever Young,' is your ticket to a timeless groove.

Deniece's path from chart-topping glory to triumphant comeback is a lesson in resilience. Her new album is as enticing as mulled wine on a December night.

Kimberly Cunningham, our agony aunt for this issue and Child Development Sorceress, imparts wisdom on childhood magic through play. She has more tricks up her sleeve than a magician at a kid's party.

In the spirit of spreading holiday cheer, our bloggers have curated the ultimate Christmas wish list. Every London Mum can channel their inner Santa like a pro.

The London Mums team poured their hearts into this winter wonder, hoping it warms yours as much as it did ours.

**Spread the word – joining London Mums is totally and utterly FREE!**

Monica Costa



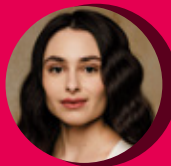
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## EXCLUSIVE



# THE Big INTERVIEW

## Esther Abrami

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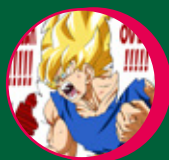
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# Music Star!

## Esther Abrami: A MODERN MUSE IN CLASSICAL MUSIC

By Monica Costa

*Esther Abrami, a rising star in classical music, brings a fresh perspective to film soundtracks, enticing young enthusiasts into the genre. Recently, I witnessed her spellbinding performance at London's LSOO*

*St. Luke's, where her talent was matched by her grace and warmth.*

*At just 26, Esther's journey has been extraordinary, with education at esteemed institutions and accolades including the 'Social Media Superstar' at the Global Awards. Her latest album, "Cinéma," is a testament to her artistry.*

**Q:** Congratulations on the release of your new album, "Cinéma"! Could you share with me what inspired you to create this collection of film and TV scores, classical music, and anime hits?

**EA:** Thank you! What inspired me is the notion that a movie's soundtrack transcends musical boundaries. It's a tool to introduce classical and orchestral music to a broader audience.



**Q: You've mentioned that you carefully curated each piece on the album to reflect your background, heritage, and support for women in music. Could you tell me more about how these elements influenced your song selections?**

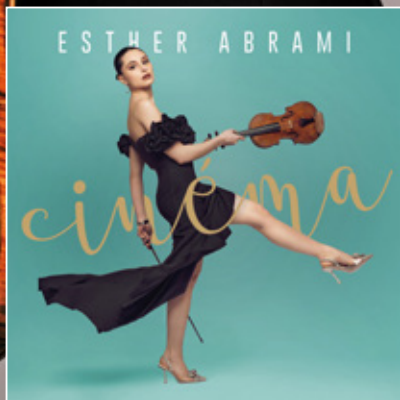
**EA:** When I record, I aim for pieces with a personal connection to my life. Being French, I included tracks from beloved French films. Also, including soundtracks with historical significance to my family was crucial. As for supporting women in music, I'm determined to promote female composers and ensure a different path for the next generation.

**Q: "Naruto: Alone Theme" is the first single from "Cinéma". What drew you to this particular piece, and how did you approach reimagining it with a philharmonic orchestra?**

**EA:** I loved anime as a teenager and realised the music from Naruto had never been recorded for violin and orchestra. Hearing it come to life with a full orchestra was truly amazing.

**Q: The album includes unique arrangements of both blockbuster hits and beloved classics. Can you share some insights into your creative process when adapting these iconic pieces for violin and orchestra?**

**EA:** It's a delicate process to arrange existing music. You must create something new while preserving the original magic. Having a supportive team and receiving feedback are crucial.





**Q: Two of the pieces on the album feature different types of instrumentation, one with a loop station and another with a guitarist. How did you decide on these unique approaches, and what was it like working with different musicians for these arrangements?**

**EA:** I aim to give each recording a personal touch. The loop station idea came to me while experimenting with my violin. It was important to create something different for "Amélie Poulain". For the duet with guitar, we wanted a fresh take on a classic piece, so we spent hours in the studio exploring new possibilities.

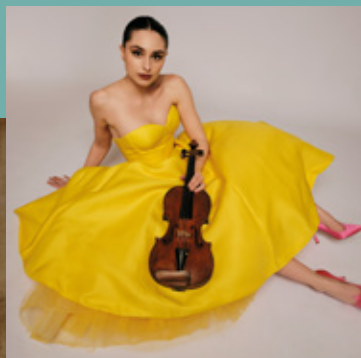
**Q: You recorded "Cinéma" at the legendary Smeky Studios in Prague. Could you tell me about your experience working in such a renowned studio with the City of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra?**

**EA:** It was incredible! Recording in such an iconic space was highly inspiring. Facing a big orchestra there for my album was a surreal moment.

**Q: The album also includes world premiere recordings by Oscar-winning composers Anne Dudley and Rachel Portman. Can you share some insights into collaborating with these accomplished artists?**

**EA:** Anne Dudley and Rachel Portman are inspiring figures in their field. Collaborating with them was a privilege. As classical musicians, we often work with composers long gone, so working with living legends is truly special.

**Q: "Cinéma" seems to be a rich tapestry of music spanning genres, cultures, and generations. Is there a particular piece on the album that holds a special significance for you, and if so, could you tell me why?**





**EA:** "Zeyn" holds a special place in my heart. It's from the movie "Capharnaüm" and the story deeply touched me. The music, composed by Khaled Mouzanar, is heart-wrenching.

**Q:** Your career has seen remarkable achievements, from winning the 'Social Media Superstar' category at the Global Awards to being featured in Classic FM's '30 under 30 Classical Artists to Watch'. How do you balance your online presence with your musical pursuits?

**EA:** It's demanding, but I love creating content for social media. It's about being exceptionally organised to manage it all alongside my rigorous practice routine.

**Q:** You've become known for your efforts in addressing the gender gap and stereotypes in the music industry. Can you tell me about your work with 'Her Ensemble' and what you hope to achieve with this initiative?



**EA:** The 'Her Ensemble' initiative is close to my heart. It's about supporting women in a field that can be challenging. Working with a team of incredible women where we're heard and valued is a rare and precious experience.

**Q:** Your podcast, 'Women in Classical', showcases outstanding women musicians and composers. Could you share a bit about the inspiration behind this project and what you hope listeners will take away from it?

**EA:** I believe conversations can drive change. 'Women in Classical' provides a space to discuss topics often considered taboo. Hearing advice from seasoned women in the industry can be incredibly beneficial and make others feel less alone in their experiences.

**Thank you, Esther, for sharing your insights and experiences. I'm eager to hear about your upcoming projects and wish you continued success in your musical journey!**



# Ask The Expert!

## The Potential of Play: HOW OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY FOSTERS CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

**By Kimberly Cunningham, Senior Occupational Therapist for the NYC Department of Education and founder of Hands on Fun OT.**



Childhood is a critical period for growth and development, because it's where the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social skills begin to take shape. These are the skills that kids will carry forward as they grow up and lead successful, fulfilling lives. Sometimes, kids need a little extra support in mastering these skills, and that's where Occupational therapy (OT) can help. Particularly at a young age, early intervention plays a vital role in helping kids feel more comfortable, more autonomous, and more self-confident.

In general, occupational therapy serves as a vital support system to empower your child's development. It plays a pivotal role in refining fine and gross motor skills, and in shaping the foundation for their physical abilities. Through engaging in age-appropriate activities, OT can offer your children an opportunity to enhance essential skills like handwriting, utensil use, balance, and coordination.

But there's more to occupational therapy than just movement. For example, through interactive games and creative exercises, OT can help your child become a better problem solver, enhance their memory skills, and improve their concentration—all while having fun!

Something I often see in kids who come to OT is that, for many of these children, managing emotions can sometimes be a challenge. So, by introducing a safe and accepting space for your child to express and understand their feelings, OT can help your child learn valuable emotional regulation skills, helping them navigate complex emotions and find balance.

Social skills are another vital aspect of your child's growth, and occupational therapy provides a friendly environment to nurture them. These are typically enhanced through group activities, where children learn to communicate, collaborate, and empathise with peers, laying the groundwork for meaningful friendships and positive social interactions.

And last but not least, if your child struggles with sensitivities to things like loud noises or different textures, occupational therapy can offer specialised activities to gently increase their comfort levels and help them feel more at ease.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, published studies have highlighted that mainstream

learners have a need for and can benefit from complementary fine and gross motor exercises. So, after twenty five years as a licensed therapist and OT instructor, I founded Hands On Fun Occupational Therapy (HOFOT for short). At HOFOT, we work to promote healthy, age appropriate skill development in children using techniques backed by science! In particular, HOFOT offers supplementary programs to assist children at a preschool age meet their developmental milestones through tailored playtime activities that are comprehensive, adaptable, and—most importantly—centred around the mission: healing through play.

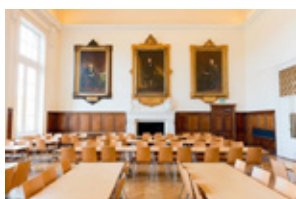
Play really is the language of children, and it's through play that they explore the world, learn about themselves, and develop crucial skills. By using engaging and motivating play-based strategies, occupational therapy effectively captures children's attention and maintains their active engagement throughout the therapeutic process. These playful activities not only serve as enjoyable experiences but also provide a natural context that closely resembles real-life situations, allowing children to practice and generalise crucial skills in a meaningful and practical manner.

This approach also helps foster a calm and stress-free environment, which is crucial to help kids overcome any therapy jitters they may feel. A relaxed setting enables children to express themselves more comfortably, which facilitates effective communication and enables therapists to address their needs more effectively. And last but not least, this play-oriented methodology extends its impact by working to seamlessly integrate the skills they acquire during therapy into their daily routines. In my experience, I've learned that by encouraging parents and caregivers to play an active role in their child's OT, they can not only promote consistency in their child's new behaviors, but also expedite their progress, which really creates a holistic and effective path toward the child's overall development and well-being.

Occupational therapy has evolved into an essential cornerstone of childhood development, it's crucial that we continue finding ways to help children overcome challenges and reach their full potential. Through our work, 'Hands on Fun OT' exemplifies this visionary approach to occupational therapy by combining evidence-based practices with the joy of play-based learning.

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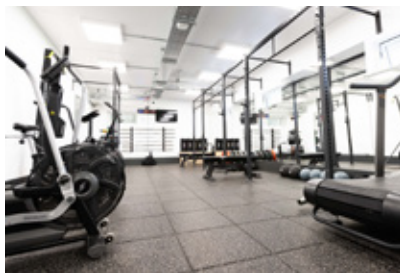


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# Star Mum!

## **Izzy Judd** SHARES HER SECRETS TO BALANCING MOTHERHOOD, A MUSIC CAREER AND WELLNESS

By Monica Costa

*In this exclusive interview, I explore the life of Izzy Judd, a musician with a rich heritage in melody. Raised in a musically accomplished family in Hertfordshire, Judd was always surrounded by her three older brothers, all skilled musicians and music was the fluent language in her household.*

*Embarking on her violin journey at the age of five, Judd's passion became the guiding force of her musical odyssey, which led her through esteemed institutions such as the Royal College of Music in London and Chetham's School of Music in Manchester.*

*However, life's symphony was not without its challenges. In 2014, Judd confronted the heartbreak of a miscarriage, a testament to her resilience. Yet, in early 2015, a new melody began as she embarked on the challenging journey to motherhood through IVF.*

*Judd's narrative is one of unwavering determination, evident both in her musical pursuits and in her deeply personal journey through family. Accompanying her on this journey is her husband, Harry Judd, an English musician, dancer and author, best known as the drummer for the band McFly.*



**Balancing a career, parenting, and being married to a rock star can be quite demanding. Could you share some of your go-to strategies for maintaining a harmonious family life amidst such a busy schedule?**

*"I think for many mums, the juggle of parenting and having a career is challenging. I'm always working on planning in time for myself, and reminding myself that the relentless tasks can wait! My moment of calm is a yoga class, playing my violin, walking or doing my tapestry. I've also joined the mum choir at school which I love. When I have done something for myself I always find it helps everyone as I'm a calmer mum."*

**Given your experiences, what would be your top piece of advice for fellow parents who are striving to balance their careers, family life and personal wellness?**

*"Sleep is my go-to, there is nothing more needed than a good night's sleep to take care of your personal wellness. Balancing my career and family life is always a work in progress but I try to remind myself to stop and question what my priorities and self-values are."*

**How has your background in music influenced your journey as an artist, and how do you think it has shaped your creative process?**

*"Having grown up surrounded by music, it has influenced me in every possible way. Discipline and the ability to focus have stuck with me. Even though my career has moved in different directions, the basic skills I have learned have helped me on whichever road I've taken, especially creatively."*

**Collaborating with your husband Harry, how do you balance the personal and professional aspects of your relationship when working on music projects together?**

*"Harry and I met on the McFly Wonderland tour in 2005, so keeping a professional and personal relationship has been with us since the beginning. It has always felt very natural and we love being able to work on projects together (it's also nice to be able to spend time together!)"*

**Your memoir, "Dare to Dream", beautifully touches on your experiences and emotions. How has this journey influenced your music, and do you find it cathartic to express yourself through your songs?**

*"Music has always been the glue that connects me back to me, in traumatic*



*moments and happy moments. It is a language that doesn't need words so I use it as a way to express myself. It is where I feel most at home and most me. During our fertility struggles I found it difficult to listen to music as it was too emotional at times, however when I was pregnant with my daughter Lola, I used to listen to 'Half the World Away' by Aurora through ear buds on my tummy and to this day this song soothes us both."*

**Parenthood is a significant aspect of both your and Harry's lives. How has being parents influenced the themes and emotions conveyed in your music?**

*"For me personally, I started to pick up my violin a lot more when Lockie was born. He used to sit in his bouncer looking up at me whilst I played him lullabies, I was amazed how quickly he stopped crying and how my shoulders dropped with relaxation. It is very easy to lose yourself in motherhood, reconnecting with something you love can be so powerful."*

**Your advocacy for mental health and well-being is admirable. How do you**

## **use your platform and music to raise awareness and support for mental health issues?**

*"I've always spoken very openly about my struggles with anxiety because it is a part of who I am. It also gives me comfort to talk about it and for people to also share their experiences. We all feel better when we feel less alone.*

*Mindfulness has been an anchor for me, so when I play my violin, I feel very present and grounded."*

## **Looking ahead, what exciting projects or ventures can we expect from you in the near future, and how do you envision your musical journey progressing?**

*"I'm excited to be releasing "Moments" which is a collection of songs arranged for violin and piano. It felt amazing to be in the studio recording and it really helped my confidence stepping out of being mum for a little while. I have been so grateful to the community on Instagram for supporting me over the years so this is a little something I would like to give back to them."*

## **As a mother, how do you prioritise natural and scientifically backed wellness solutions for your children? Are there any specific products you find particularly helpful?**

*"Zarbee's is the perfect solution for our family as taking care of our health and wellbeing is really important to us. I like that Zarbee's is made with naturally*

*sourced ingredients that are backed by science and inspired by nature. As we go back into the school term and the coughs and colds are starting, the Children's Cough and Sore Throat syrup has been really helping Lockie's cough, which I have been grateful for, especially in the night! It is made with natural flavouring including pure honey which means it's tasty and helps to soothe and calm a cough, helping your little one sleep."*

## **Could you tell us about any upcoming projects or initiatives you're working on in your role as a brand ambassador for Zarbee's?**

*"As a mum of 3 I'm always on the lookout for well-being brands that have something for all the family, the simpler the better as our routine is always busy! Zarbee's Children's MultiVits + Immune support is perfect for pouring onto cereal in the morning and the Adult Evening Immune Support made with honey and lavender extract is a delicious shot of goodness before bed."*





# A LONDON NANNY NOW COSTS £43K AMID SOARING DEMAND FROM FAMILIES WHO CAN'T GET NURSERY PLACES

Parents weighing up childcare options may find costs and competition for nannies soaring amid a reduction in the number of nursery places.

London nannies have had an 8% pay rise in the past year, with the average annual salary now £42,848, equivalent to £3,571 per month. But the biggest rises have been seen across the Home Counties and Greater London, where nanny salaries are up 14% to £40,300, or £3,358 per month. That's according to the latest figures published by Nannytax, the largest and longest-running nanny payroll provider in the UK.

A breakdown of earnings in the capital reveals nannies in Central London earn the most, at £18.58 per hour, while nannies in North West London earn the least at £15.51. Looking at Greater London and the Home Counties, Buckinghamshire nannies earn the most at £15.91 per hour, while Essex nannies earn the least at £14.72.

The figures, based on the company's internal payroll records for the tax year 2022/23, are calculated for live-out nannies working full time, 50 hours per week, before tax. Outside of London and its suburbs, nannies across the rest of the UK earn £35,984 per year, equivalent to £2,999 per month, up 11% on the previous tax year.

One reason for rising salaries is the reduction in childcare places. Official figures from Ofsted show the number of childcare providers, including nurseries and childminders, fell by 4,800 in the year to the end of March 2023, while the number of childcare places fell by 24,500.

In a Nannytax survey of 639 parents who currently hire nannies, 9% said their decision to do so was influenced by the fact they couldn't secure nursery places for their children. More than half (57%) said they needed wraparound care to cover school runs, teatime or bath time, 50% worked long hours, and 18% worked unusual shift patterns.

Kirsty Wild, a nanny employment expert at Nannytax, says: "Although full-time nannies are expensive, we know most families (55%) are only using nannies part time, to cover childcare gaps and enable them to carry on working.

"We think the Government could be doing far more to help hardworking families cover nanny costs and help more women return to work. The Chancellor announced in March that every child from nine months old in an eligible working family would be entitled to 30 hours of free childcare by September 2025, and yet this doesn't include childcare offered by nannies. That's nonsensical given the clear need for care outside of nurseries' and childminders' operating hours. We'd like to see the Government make 30 hours free childcare more flexible by including nannies."



Photo credit: Kampus Production / Pexels

# Book Corner

## ERIN AND THE MOUSE: TALES DEDICATED TO ALL THOSE WHO CANNOT SPEAK

**Published on 11th November 2023, Clare Latham's *Erin and the Mouse*** will delight its young readers, and especially those who are unable to communicate. Transferring the real life story of a young girl called Erin to fiction, this new book shares how a bespoke communication system, and her mouse, becomes the conduit for Erin accessing the world, whilst providing family, friends and others with the chance to speak with Erin and her embrace her joie de vivre.

With cerebral palsy limiting Erin's only means of communication to eye movement, these uplifting stories burst with positive messages of never giving up and acceptance of oneself.

A great read and one that is destined to become a bedtime favourite for all youngsters, congratulations must go to the author for bringing Erin's story to the fore, and to the real Erin for agreeing to share her story, vitality and sense of fun.

All profits from sales of this book will go to SpecialEffect, the charity that built the communication system for Erin.

### The story

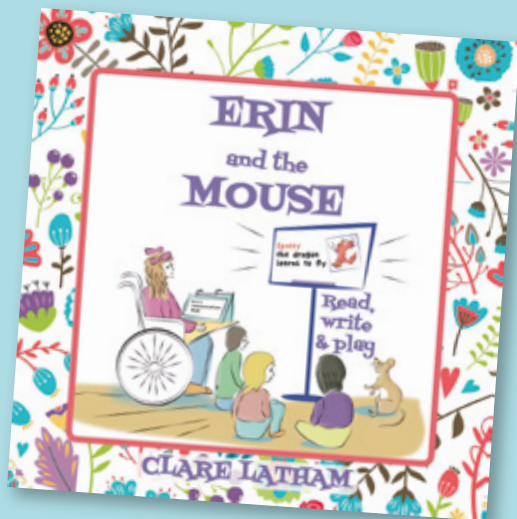
Just as the heroine in these stories, in real life Erin is a young girl who cannot walk, talk or use her hands. She has cerebral palsy and her only reliable movement is her eyes.

Each of the scenarios were experienced by Erin and author Clare Latham – from Erin writing with her eyes and finding the print button, to playing the recorder, to hosting her own reading club and to her wonderful peer group who effortlessly watched her eyes and heard her stories.

Included in these tales are subtle messages for her and many others such as 'never give up', 'I am able just as I am', 'reading gives one so much' and 'accept me as me'.

Clare Latham was asked by SpecialEffect founder Dr Mick Donegan if she could build a communication system with Erin, which she did

together with her Mum and personal assistant. Erin's tenacity, ability and sense of fun then spurred Clare to write these stories from their shared experiences and, as it were, keep her going.



### The author

Clare Latham is a retired speech and language therapist, and lives in the UK. The author says: "With 17 million around the world living with cerebral palsy\*, my stories are dedicated to all children who cannot speak. You can communicate, I believe in you and we need to hear YOUR stories. We need to learn from you."

"SpecialEffect is the charity who discovered Erin. It is dedicated to giving disabled people the technology to access video games and the internet, thus promoting fun and inclusion. Dr Donegan was awarded an MBE for his service to disability."

**Published by GB Publishing, *Erin and the Mouse* (ISBN No: 9781912031047) is available in paperback priced £7.99, [gbpublishing.co.uk](http://gbpublishing.co.uk) on Amazon, the publisher's website and book stores worldwide.**

# Book Corner

## Youth Novel: "OUT OF TIME"

By Mark Golding

The new release, "**Out of Time**," published by Bumblebee Books (an imprint of Olympia Publishers), starts with a bang (literally) and never lets up.

It is an exceedingly exciting book for ages 8-12, providing a time-travelling tale for both boys and girls alike. It captures and holds the reader's imagination from the very first page and

quickly becomes a book they just can't put down. Those who have already read it have provided Mark with rave reviews about the book: "Fast-paced, a real page-turner," "Immediately hooked from the first page," "Relatable story".

The star of the book is Joe Jackson, a twelve-year-old boy who is constantly looking for his next adventure. We meet Joe at a time when his inquisitive nature leads him to an old and abandoned WWII bomb site... perfect for exploring... except this is no ordinary bomb site!

What follows is an adventure through time and space where he meets Max, a young alien whose spaceship has crash-landed on Earth.

Joe, Max, and their friends, Mo and the Robinson family, will embark on an adventure through time and space where they will encounter dinosaurs, Roman legionaries, and medieval knights as they try to stop the evil and ambitious Dardan from taking over planet Earth.

Although only released in June 2023, it has already sold out twice and has also won a prestigious award - The Golden Wizard Book Prize, with the CEO Louise Jane quoted as saying, "The author is a big talent and has delivered a tale jam-packed with adventure that



Teacher by day, author by night London-born Mark is a law graduate who moved into teaching over 10 years ago. Now a secondary school teacher in Liverpool, he first caught the writing bug during

the first national lockdown. One day during the lockdown and following the recent death of his father, Mark sat down in front of his computer and just had this urge to create a story.

He started to write and carried on writing... he couldn't stop! Initially based around the adventures of his cat, Milo, he soon incorporated his nephew and the adventures he'd get up to. Two years later, having used his personal love of adventure, travel, history, and his vivid imagination, he had created his first children's book - "**Out of Time**".

children will devour. The storyline is brilliantly whimsical and unique, making imaginations run wild as they follow all the unpredictably fun plot twists."

Mark's children's book has captured all the fun of being an adventurous child while integrating an educational element into the story, a very fun way for a young reader to learn without even realising.

Mark lives in Greater Manchester with his wife Sarah and their cat Milo.

'Out of Time' is available online at Waterstones, WHSmith and Amazon.





# Book Corner

## THE ADVENTURES OF TY:

By **Chris T A Richards**

Taking place in a world called Eden, the adventures of Ty finds its eponymous hero crowned the new Hero of Light. Ty is tasked with stopping an evil mage known as Xilef and he is quick to realise this is a job that is easier said than done. Anyone who is passionate about fantasy, anime or manga will not want to miss this one.

This book has so far received nothing but positive reviews that many new authors could only dream of. The Adventures of Ty is off to an incredible start due to Chris T A Richards' creative mind and a story that is truly absorbing.

Eden is a fascinating world where heroes, villains and all sorts of fantastic races live. (Including humans, elves, half animal hybrids, dragons and birds that can stand up like humans and even talk, along with many others).

The story

Adventures of Ty takes place in world called Eden where all sorts of races and creatures, including Humans, Elves and demons and dragons.

The world of Eden is in the realm of light and is full of magical power. The dark realm that is full of demons and other vile creatures want the light realm for themselves, thus they always invade to try and revive their King Lucifer who was defeated there long ago. His power alone could conquer Eden. To stop this from happening, someone from Eden, is chosen as the Hero of Light and it is their job to fight back the forces of darkness.

An evil mage called Xilef, wants to bring back his master King Lucifer and help him return to power to rule the light realm. Ty is chosen as the new Hero of to stop Xilef from achieving his goals. Sounds great right? Except Ty has a darkness of his own.



A new author that combines Fantasy and Anime into an otherworldly Adventure.

Image credits: Action shots from the main manga that have helped inspire me for my book.



Author says:

The angle I came from while writing this book is to give people who love anime and people who love manga a chance to read an actual book. However, anyone can enjoy it.

Five-star reviews:


While I am not a fan of anime, it blends with the fantasy aspect well and gives you a chance to visualise action in away that might not be possible in other fantasy books.

Kieran Begg

What a great fantasy read! I loved the concept of the book and Ty was a fantastic lead character. I couldn't wait to see where the story would go next.



Bookish\_ally\_cat (Bookstagrammer)

# 6 reasons Voxblock makes the perfect Christmas Gift

Meet Voxblock: the easy-to-use screen-free audiobook player for children aged 3-12. Designed by parents, it empowers children to listen to audiobooks independently. 



## 4. Voxblock fosters independence

One of Voxblock's standout attributes is its simplicity. Conceived by parents for children to use independently, its tangible books, intuitive controls and lack of connectivity mean children can take control of their listening, nurturing their independence.  

## 5. Voxblock is a gift that keeps giving

Voxblock is a gift that children can enjoy for years, not hours. Whether it's listening at bedtime, while travelling or while playing, Voxblock can find the perfect way to slot into your existing routines. With Voxblock's neutral design and the growing library of stories across ages 3-12, it's the perfect gift to grow with your child.



## 6. Listeners love it!

Voxblock has received fantastic feedback from both reviewers and customers alike. It was recently recognised as the Best Kids Audio Player for Ease of Use by both The Independent and The Evening Standard and is rated "Excellent" on Trustpilot, the consumer review site.

To make this Christmas magical with Voxblock begin with a Voxblock Starter Pack. It includes a Voxblock player, three stories, and a protective bumper for £59.99. Buy at [voxblock.co.uk](https://voxblock.co.uk) 





## 1. Voxblock nurtures a passion for stories

Voxblock introduces youngsters to the enchanting universe of stories through its audiobook library. Titles range from best sellers such as A Bear Called Paddington and The Adventures of the Wishing Chair, to popular series like Pippi Longstocking and Horrible Histories. There are also the latest stories from contemporary authors such as Konnie Huq and MG Leonard! With over 150 stories, there's something for everyone between the ages of 3 and 12.  

## 2. Voxblock boosts literacy skills

Voxblock goes beyond pure entertainment; it's a valuable ally in the quest to enhance literacy skills. Research by The National Literacy Trust has found that listening to audio stories significantly enriches a child's vocabulary, comprehension, and language proficiency skills. And the best part? They get to enjoy themselves while doing it!

## 3. Voxblock is ready-to-play, straight from the wrapping paper

There's no assembly, no set-up, no Wi-Fi or downloads. Simply unwrap Voxblock, switch it on, and let the magical world of storytelling unfold on Christmas morning. It's a gift that ensures the fun begins straight away, and avoids a stressful Christmas morning!  



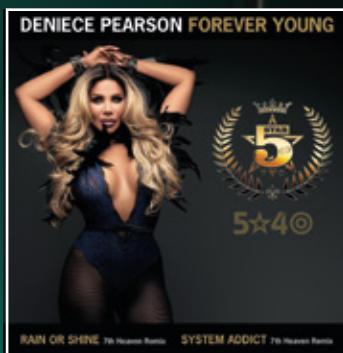
# Music Interview!

## Deniece Pearson: 40 YEARS OF MUSICAL BRILLIANCE & A POWERFUL COMEBACK

*The FIVE STAR lead singer reflects on iconic hits, new releases and her inspirational journey in music.*

*By Monica Costa*

Deniece Pearson, the dynamic lead singer of the iconic pop group FIVE STAR, is back in action, celebrating an astounding 40 years in the music industry. Her latest single, 'Forever Young,' exudes an infectious reggae-infused pop vibe that's bound to lift everyone's spirits. This track is just a glimpse of what's in store, as it's part of a sizzling EP featuring fresh versions of FIVE STAR classics 'System Addict' and 'Rain or Shine.' Hold tight because there's more to come – Deniece is set to drop her eagerly awaited solo album 'Free-Queen-See' in spring/summer 2024. Deniece Pearson's magnetic performances have garnered her a devoted fan base, leading to sold-out shows and electrifying festival appearances throughout 2023. During the FIVE STAR era, Deniece shattered records, with over 20 top-thirty UK singles, including chart-toppers like 'System Addict,' 'The Slightest Touch,' and the timeless anthem 'Rain or Shine.' The group holds the distinction of being the youngest British act with a number one album and the first to achieve seven consecutive hits from a single album in the UK.





After a break to raise her children, Deniece triumphantly returned to the stage, leaving audiences awe-struck. From her spellbinding West End run in the Michael Jackson musical 'Thriller Live' to her show-stopping performance in 'Respect La Diva,' belting out Beyoncé's 'Listen' and a Whitney Houston medley, Deniece proved she owned the spotlight. Her star power even graced international stages, including a legendary show at the Sydney Opera House in Australia.

Deniece's appearance on BBC1's The Voice in 2012 marked a turning point, leading to a new management deal and an incredible opportunity to support The Jacksons on their UK tour. Her heartfelt tribute song 'Rafiki Yangu' (Swahili for 'My Friend') to Nelson Mandela and Africa's quest for peace and prosperity showcased Deniece's dedication to making a positive impact.

Following the success of her debut solo album 'Imprint' in the summer of 2014, supported by a blazing 16-date UK tour with Billy Ocean, Deniece continued to enrapture audiences. She teamed up with DJ and producer Sigala to rock his chart-topping hit 'Easy Love' on the Top of The Pops New Year's Day BBC1 Special.

#### **Reflecting on 40 Remarkable Years**

**Deniece Pearson (DP):** "It's been quite a Journey! Being nominated for a Grammy Award, winning Best Group at the BRITs, meeting Queen Elizabeth, Princess Margaret and Prince Edward, sell out tours, our albums breaking records and turning quadruple Platinum... it's just been such a phenomenal journey!"

#### **'Forever Young' and Musical Roots**

**DP:** "I dated a beautiful Jamaican guy for a while and all he used to tell me was "You got to get back in touch with your roots, go back to Jamaica and connect again." This stuck in my subconscious then 'Forever Young' fell from the heavens into my life!"

#### **Reimagining Classics**

**DP:** "Because it's Five Star's 40th Anniversary this year, I thought I'd mark this occasion by releasing my own solo track along with our 2 biggest hits 'System Addict' and 'Rain or Shine'! So, giving our audience some nostalgia alongside new material."





### **'Free-Queen-See' Album Teaser**

DP: "My new album 'Free-Queen-See' will be revisiting more of Five Star's catalogue, then more patois songs along with my very first Christmas track and a couple of rock songs! Lots and lots of different genres to look forward to!"

### **Balancing Act**

DP: "Choosing to stay positive, diet, meditation with the highest energy tuning in with God, and knowing I'm protected and guided. I believe we are never given anything we can't handle! We are stronger than we think! Focus, diligence, dedication and persistence are key to fulfilling our goals and passions!"

### **Connecting Through Music**

DP: "Nostalgia in my vocals and performances, Five Star were a huge part of teenagers' lives in the 80's and now we're all in our 50's and we're in our reminiscing years! We want to hear those original vocals and see the dance routines too! It's such a blessing for my passion to still be needed and wanted. Our God is a great provider!"

### **Defining Moments with FIVE STAR**

DP: "Our sold out tours, winning our awards and breaking Michael Jackson's record for having the most singles released off of one album, touring the world."

### **Triumphant Return**

DP: "Well, I got everything I asked for - marriage, my son and my daughter, a white picket fence and a beautiful home! The only thing that was missing was my music! I decided I wanted and needed to reconnect again so I moved back to England and restarted my career. This move was the best one I ever made apart from my children."

### **Honouring Michael Jackson in 'Thriller Live'**

DP: "Phenomenal! I learnt a lot about myself and Michael - what a talent! From his vocals to his moves, this guy was most certainly resonating on his highest level - living his true thread and life path! It was an honour to sing his songs!"

### **Paying Tribute to Beyoncé and Whitney Houston**

DP: "Over the years I have grown into my vocal range so when this show came along there was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to be part of it! I've listened to Whitney, Mariah and Celine for years and their songs and range have helped me to broaden mine. Once again, an honour to sing their songs!"

### **The Impact of The Voice**

DP: "I am pleased to have been a part of this show because I got to meet some amazingly talented artists - Becky Hill was on my episode and many other brilliant talents and, of course, Mr Tom Jones! The Voice played a great part in my musical journey."

### **Advocating for Justice**

DP: "I will do whatever I can for justice! I am a firm believer in the truth and non-bullying tactics and will do everything I can to help to create a peaceful and truthful environment. 'Rafiki Yangu' came about when I played a song I wrote to a friend of mine about manifestation. He replied, "What about the children of the world who are starving?" Can't you write about that"! So, I changed my whole song lyric and learnt a little African! A great experience, I absolutely love languages!"

### **A Christmas Anthem**

DP: "I am happy to announce my first ever Christmas single! You can quote me on this: "My song 'Santa Clause is Coming' is 2023's Christmas Number 1". It has a patois feel to it and it is totally magnificent! Straight from the heavens!"

### **Christmas Traditions**

DP: "Spend time around the fireplace with loved ones and cooking together in the kitchen, turning the lights down low and opening presents in the glow of the fireplace and Christmas tree lights! Gorgeous, I am truly a Christmas Girl!"



# Chic Outdoor Furniture with a Conscience

*Transform your outdoor space with show-stopping pieces from leading furniture brand, LifestyleGarden® that are built to last, require little-to-no maintenance, and are designed responsibly to minimise waste and impact on the environment.*

From pared-back Scandi-style ranges made from game-changing recycled materials to exquisite new FSC™ teak collections, and even sumptuous sofa sets, there is something to suit all tastes and, more importantly, to fit in with busy family lives, where maintaining garden furniture falls down the list of priorities. All ranges are endorsed by Eden Project and are manufactured in an environmentally-conscious way, using ethically-sourced materials.

LifestyleGarden®'s FSC™ teak products strike the perfect balance between style and substance. These design-led pieces are made from superior wood that offers fantastic weather-resistant properties and is incredibly low maintenance. The abundance of natural oils in teak prevents damage that would be caused by moisture, whilst also resisting rot and decay. It also has excellent insulation properties, meaning it doesn't get too hot in the summer but retains its heat during winter.

Teak ages beautifully and is highly prized for the silver-grey patina it gains over time if left untreated or easily restored if you ever want a return to the original rich brown.

LifestyleGarden®'s Nassau collection changed the face of outdoor living, through the use of ground-breaking recycled plastics that help clear the world's

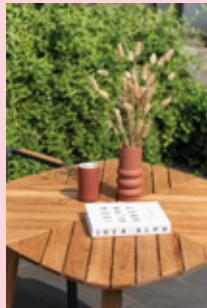


oceans and waterways of waste. **Social Plastic®** – in partnership with **Plastic Bank** – is manufactured from recycled ocean waste and plastic pollution in developing countries, whilst **DuraOcean®** is manufactured using recycled ropes from the maritime industry.

Not only are these recycled plastic materials extremely durable and resistant to anything the British weather can throw at them, but they also require zero maintenance and boast excellent colour fastness, meaning they won't fade. The furniture can be dismantled at the end of its life and all components are 100% recyclable.

LifestyleGarden® wants you to spend more time enjoying your furniture, which is why we use hardwearing and innovative materials, including our next-generation tabletops made from **Duraboard®**, and our **Olefin®** cushions, which are resistant to stains, abrasions, sunlight, fire and chemicals – so no matter how rowdy your kids or guests get, these beautiful linen-look cushions will stay looking pristine. **Olefin®** is also fast drying, so even an unexpected downpour or spillage doesn't have to stop your fun for long.

With stackable dining chairs, bistro sets, and even mini versions of our corner sofa units available, you don't need to have a huge garden to enjoy our ranges. The option to 'mix and match' products means you can create the perfect combination for whatever size space you have to play with.



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# Travel

## Catania, Sicily: 10 FAMILY-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES

By Monica Costa and Diego Scintu

Embarking on a journey to Sicily with my 78-year-old mother, her Maltese dog, and my 17-year-old son presented its challenges, but it turned out to be a transformative experience. Catania, nestled on Sicily's east coast, welcomed us with its rich history, vibrant culture and natural beauty. From exploring ancient ruins to savouring Sicilian gelato, every moment in this city was filled with wonder, joy, and adventure for all ages.

Here are the highlights of our adventures:

**1. Piazza del Duomo:** Our journey began at Piazza del Duomo, a grand square, surrounded by iconic landmarks, including the Catania Cathedral and Elephant Fountain.

**2. Stay at San Demetrio Rooms at Via Etnea 55** Our centrally located Bed & Breakfast, San Demetrio Rooms, was at the centre of city's vibrant atmosphere.

**3. Sicilian Cuisine:** We indulged in Sicilian delicacies like arancini, cannoli and pasta alla Norma, the rich of the region.



**4. La Playa di Catania:** The city's main beach, La Playa di Catania, offered a perfect escape.

**5. Hiking on the Etna Volcano:** A visit to Mount Etna, Europe's most active volcano, provided inspiring family adventures, from guided hikes to cable car rides.



**6. Vibrant Markets:** Navigating the bustling markets of La Pescheria and Fera o Luni exposed us to the city's lively local life and culture.

**7. Roman Theatre and Odeon:** Ancient Marvels Transported back in time, we explored the well-preserved Roman Theatre and Odeon, gaining insights into Catania's rich past.

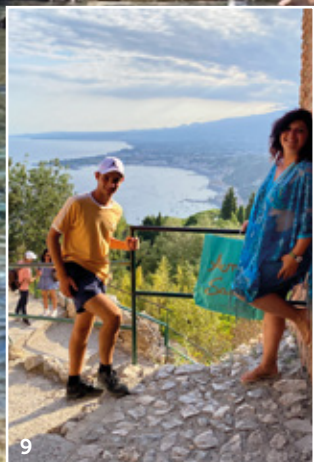
**8. Baroque Architecture:** A stroll down Via dei Crociferi Street revealed Catania's artistic heritage, showcasing elegant Baroque buildings and churches.

**9. Taormina and Isola Bella:** A short drive away, Taormina offered enchanting underwater exploration and breath-taking coastal views. We also loved exploring the Greek Anfiteatro in Taormina.

**10. Ursino Castle:** Steeped in history, this medieval castle housed the Civic Museum, to learn all about Catania's past.

**11. Festivals:** Depending on the time of your visit, you might have the chance to attend Catania's vibrant festivals, such as the Festa di Sant'Agata in February.

*To read the full detailed version of this article, head to the travel section of London Mums magazine online.*







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# Book Corner

## THE ADVENTURES OF FLOSSIE THE FLOWER AND FRIENDS

**By Robert Boland and Kirsty Boland**

*New Children's Book Helps Toddlers Embrace Nature, Flora and Animals - Right from the Start*

Teaching young children how to appreciate and enjoy nature and the outdoors from an early age has never been more important. With so many children focused on mobile phones, apps and technology sadly many grow up missing out on the wonders and benefits of our natural world. Now a new children's book has been published to help parents teach their children just how wonderful nature and animals can be.

This autumn sees the release of a brand-new children's adventure book 'The Adventure of Flossie the Flower'. Aimed at children aged 1–6 years old the book is the first in a series by authors Robert Boland and Kirsty Boland which looks set to help parents teach and inform their toddlers about nature, forest, flowers and animals.

### The story

Flossie the Flower lives by the famous Loch Ness in the Scottish Highlands and is protected by Nessie the monster and her family – Nancy, Bessie and Basher.

Children will love to embrace the charming characters of the book and join them on their travels of adventure and fun. The story takes the reader on outings and journeys all over Scotland, visiting sacred sites, fairy ponds and glens and will fire even the youngest of imaginations.

Author Robert Boland said "I wrote the story for my new granddaughter who absolutely loved it so I have decided to publish it as the first book in a series of further adventures which I hope many other children and parents will enjoy".

### The Author (in his own words)

I'm a retired chef living in Glasgow and have a wonderful new granddaughter called Aurora. This is my debut children's book which I had written for Aurora but am pleased that many other children around the world can now enjoy. I have lots of new adventure ideas for the characters so there further additions to the series coming soon.

The Adventures of Flossie the Flower by Robert Boland and Kirsty Boland is available from all good book shops and online at Amazon.



# THE MODERN-DAY *Advent Gift* THAT WILL KEEP GIVING THROUGHOUT DECEMBER & BEYOND

If your attention is turning to this year's Advent Calendar, look no further than an alternative that will keep on giving year after year. A group of 24-talented authors have come together to write a collection of magical, inclusive, and diverse stories in the first ever The Enchanted Christmas Treasury. With a story for each day of advent, aimed at children aged five to eight, the hardback book will be a special memory-making moment for parents to share year after year.

Featuring stories of ninja nans, brave pups and fallen angels finding their way to the top of the Christmas tree, the whimsical characters, enchanted settings, and heartwarming messages are sure to fill your festive season with joy.

The best part? The magic will transport children and parents alike to a world of enchantment and wonder, as they read together and create special memories lasting a lifetime.

All proceeds raised from sales of The Enchanted Christmas Treasury will help fund the work of SENStory, a UK-wide not-for-profit Community Interest Company, helping children, young people, and families with Special Educational Needs navigate their journeys in nature through therapy, play, learning and training opportunities.

The Enchanted Christmas Treasury will be published on 2nd November 2023 and will be available on Amazon, Waterstones.com and [www.authorsandco.pub/Christmas-book](http://www.authorsandco.pub/Christmas-book)





# LONDON MUMS ULTIMATE *Christmas Wishlist*

## Groov-e digital camera

Affordable, fun digital camera for children aged four and above. The built-in memory allows for content to be stored on the camera.

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Robert Dyas

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**Specsavers TEEN 139**  
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[www.specsavers.co.uk](http://www.specsavers.co.uk)



**Voxblock, the screen-free audio player for kids.** The Starter Pack includes player, three stories and protective bumper.  
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**Disney Frozen Singing Doll - Anna by Mattel**  
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