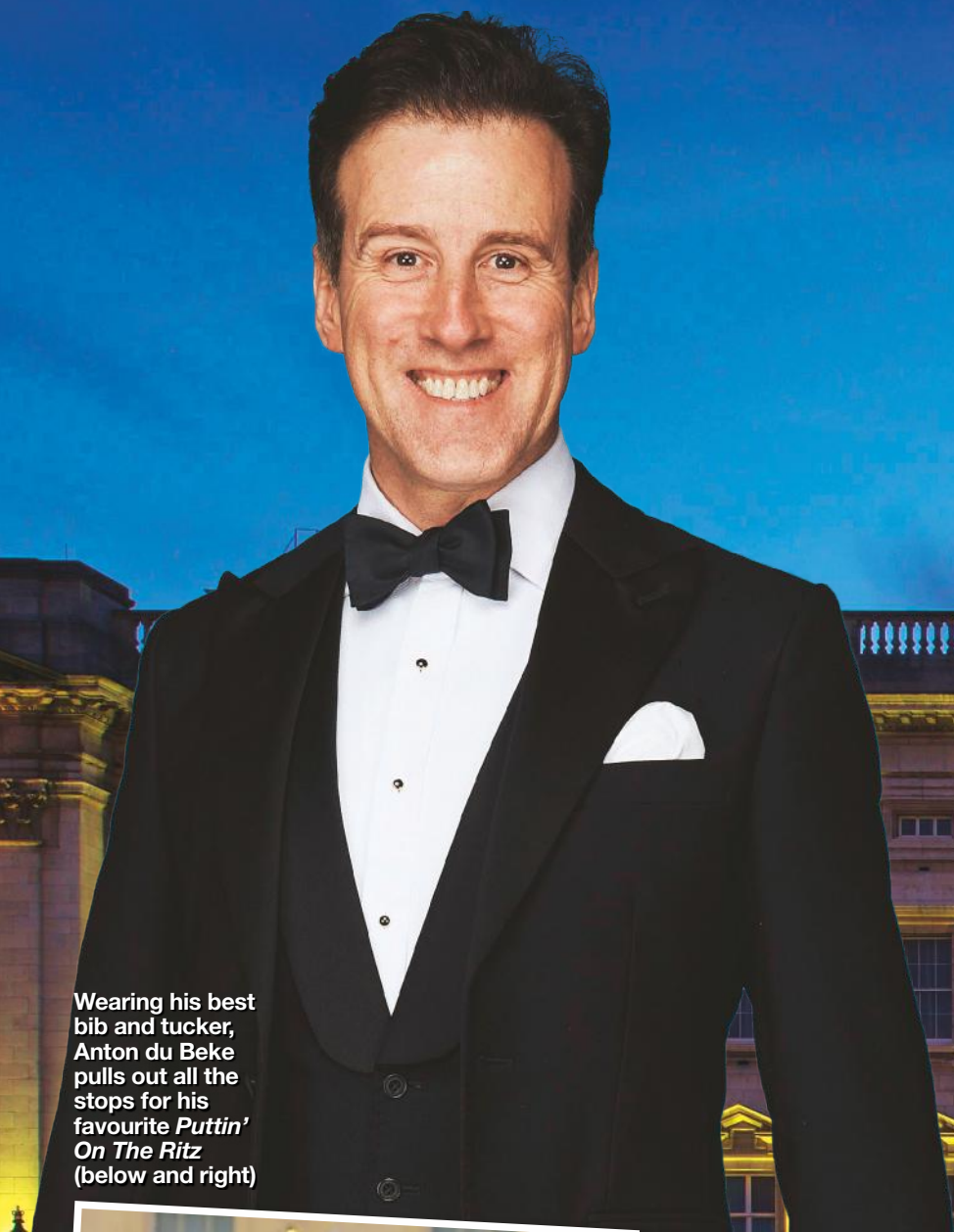


# V.E. DAY MEMORIES

Seventy-five years after Victory in Europe was announced, the nation came together again for a monumental day of thanks and remembrance for those who gave their lives or sacrificed so much in the Second World War. From a spectacular Spitfire salute to a Buckingham Palace concert – and some special video calls to veterans by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge – the celebrations culminated in a moving speech from the Queen, watched by more than eight million viewers. Here HELLO! talks to key players behind the showstopping spectacles as they share their feelings and memories about the day



Wearing his best bib and tucker, Anton du Beke pulls out all the stops for his favourite *Puttin' On The Ritz* (below and right)



**'It was incredibly meaningful and such a massive honour to be involved'**

## ANTON DU BEKE

*Strictly Come Dancing's* Anton opened the BBC's special show with his version of the Irving Berlin classic *Puttin' On the Ritz*.

‘I got a call a couple of weeks beforehand to ask if I would like to be involved, at which point I said I’d love to be. I spoke to a couple of the producers who said they wanted me to sing *Puttin' On the Ritz* – it’s one of my absolute favourite songs, so I was delighted.

I had the outfit at home already and then they told me I’d be singing outside the front of Buckingham Palace. I was overwhelmed with excitement. Can you think of anything better to be asked to do than to sing one of my favourite songs in my favourite outfit at Buckingham Palace for a VE Day celebration? Perfect, really.

I’m lucky enough to have been to the Palace a number of times, although it never gets any less of a thrill. It was incredibly meaningful to be there on this occasion, and such a massive

honour to be involved, that you just want to do your very best.

The circumstances were a little different – we were all social-distancing – so from a distance I saw [fellow *Strictly* stars] Janette [Manrara] and Aljaz [Skorjanec], who are always a delight to see, and I chatted to the orchestra and the BBC team, but we were all three metres from each other.

I did my own hair, did you notice? Luckily, after eight weeks at home, I was wearing a top hat. Natural beauty – I didn’t need any make-up – and the suit is one I wear on my tour. Everybody adapted to the situation and it went smoothly.

It was a lovely atmosphere. Everyone was in it together. We do that sort of thing very well. VE Day is very important to all generations – there aren’t many servicemen and women left who survived the war, but what they did hasn’t been lost to the next generations. Everyone feels very strongly about it.





## BEVERLEY KNIGHT

Singer Beverley was one of eight stars entertaining viewers during the BBC's VE Day coverage with a mesmerising performance of *When the Lights Go On Again* (below left). She tells us about the unique behind-the-scenes set-up and her very personal feelings at being involved.

It was a strange one, with no audience. Social distancing was strictly observed and it was just the camera crew, the military orchestra and myself and BBC presenter Sophie Raworth. It was filmed over three days so they could get all the performances done without people crossing paths.

I've never done a performance of that scale with no one there. I was like: "Where is everyone?" But that simplicity spoke to me more than a big show and dance. This way, it was a commemoration, which is how I went into it, as opposed to a good old knees-up with no actual substance behind it. I loved it.

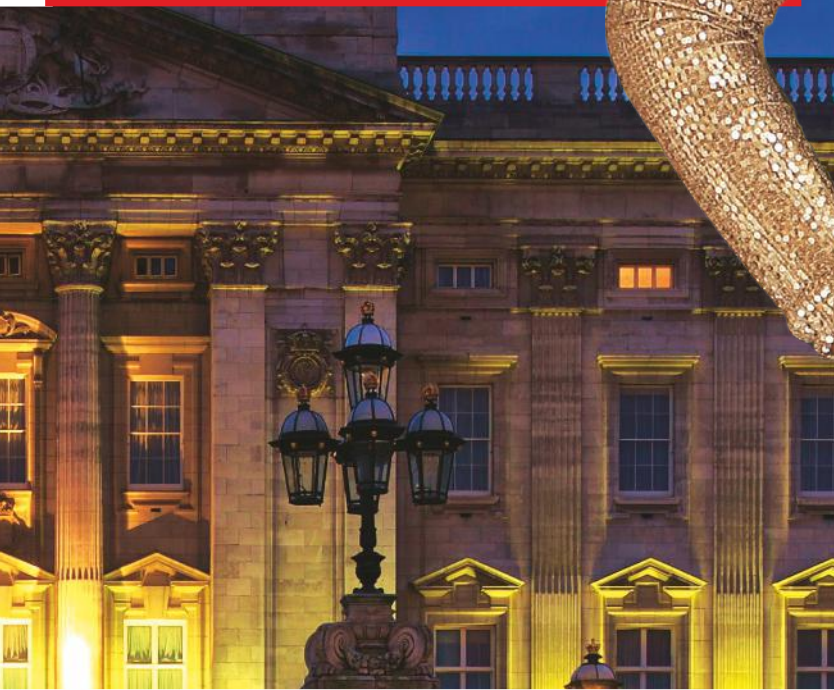
It was wonderful being in the Palace, wonderful. The only other time I've been there was when I was with my mum and dad receiving my MBE, which was strictly ceremonial.

I came with my make-up and hair already done, so it was pop the dress on and the heels and get out there. Because of the occasion, I wanted to keep it quite simple, but to also have a touch of the 1940s, so I had a really good look through my wardrobe – I have quite a big wardrobe – and I thought: "This'll work." The dress's neckline and the way it falls is very 1940s, but the sequin obviously gives it a little bit of something.

As a woman of colour, as a black woman, I was particularly proud to be there and, in my mind, represent the rest of the empire who came to the aid of Britain and the allies and were part of the allied effort.

I have two great-uncles who were part of the war effort who died long before I was born, so I was doing it for them as well as the wider Allied effort and everyone who sacrificed so much during the war years.

I can look back on that and say: "I was a part of that. I was there at the commemoration." I felt so proud. My mum was so proud.







**'The sun being in the south meant the White Cliffs of Dover were radiant. They were shining'**

**SQUADRON LEADER MARK 'DISCO' DISCOMBE**



Mark brings back memories in a historic Spitfire (top), flying high as part of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight aircrew, which sees him pilot many of the conflict's classic planes

Squadron Leader Mark “Disco” Discombe piloted one of the two Spitfires that performed the flypast over the White Cliffs of Dover. A member of the Royal Air Force for more than 30 years, he heads the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight aircrew.

“It’s always a privilege to commemorate any of the major events the nation is part of, but for me there was an element of relief as well that Covid-19 hadn’t stopped us looking back and spending some time to reflect and remember.

I think it was absolutely brilliant that we could do a fitting commemoration for, in my eyes, the greatest generation and what they went through for our freedom, while under this pandemic.

We were incredibly lucky with the weather. There was almost not a cloud in the sky and the sun being in the south meant the White Cliffs were radiant. They were shining.

We were operating low down at 250ft, so we could see the lone piper on the cliffs and we had a Royal Naval ship offshore – so knowing we had the army piper there, the Royal Navy and our aircraft made it a very tri-service event. It really did feel like we were doing something special.

For some people, the sight of the White Cliffs of Dover was a sign they were approaching safety when they’d been doing airborne or ship operations. Seeing that must have been something that filled their hearts with joy.

It is an iconic landmark of Great Britain and to sit there on such a beautiful day was fantastic.”





Care home manager Susan Barnes waves hello to the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge with residents Charles Ward and Jean Hull

## SUSAN BARNES

Susan manages the Royal British Legion-run Mais House care and nursing home in East Sussex, where residents were delighted when the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge made a video call to chat to four of them on VE Day.

“The video call with Kate and Prince William was truly the highlight of recent times. The residents were put at ease with the Duke and Duchess’s calm, friendly and warm conversation.

There were lots of beautiful smiles all round and

a toast of champagne, of course! Charles, Jean, Thelma and James were absolutely overjoyed – as was I.

Charles, being our eldest resident, and Jean, being our youngest, were able to give two varied accounts of their experience with VE Day and the celebrations, while Thelma and James are both fanatical about the royal family, so of course they were given this wonderful honour.

We were informed three days prior to the call, while all the other residents just knew there was a

lovely surprise in store. We were beyond excited. We had a week of celebrations. The whole home was decorated, including the gardens. Our veterans were dressed to impress – shoes and medals were polished. The staff wore hats and were waving flags.

It speaks for itself how hard the Mais House team work and it’s such an honour to work side by side with our heroes who have given us the freedom and the opportunity now to protect them, as they did us.

## ADRIAN LESTER

Actor Adrian impressed at Buckingham Palace with his cover of *They Can’t Take That Away From Me*. The *Life* star shares his pride at being part of the day.

“I was approached about a month before the event and given a shortlist of three songs and asked to pick one. It was a great thing to do to commemorate the sacrifices made by a generation who are the most vulnerable groups of people during this present crisis.

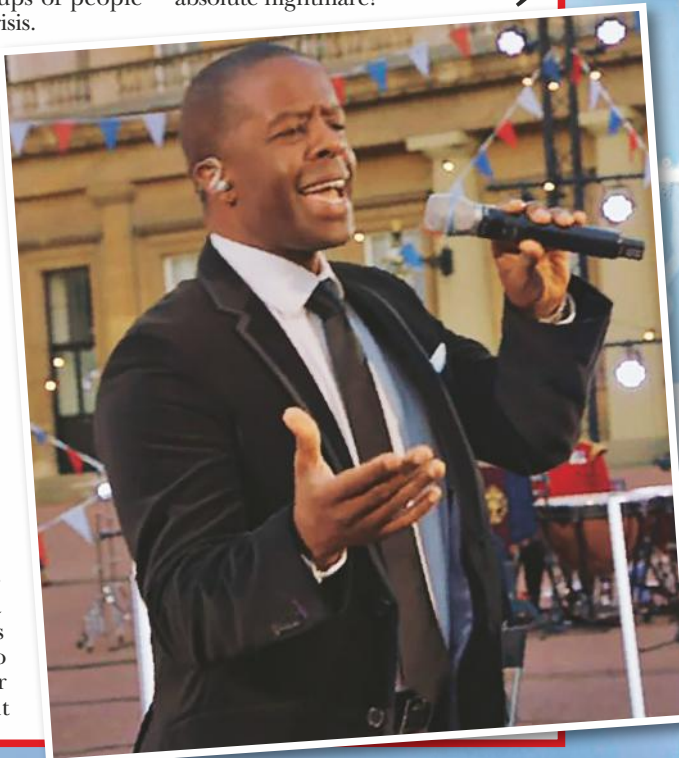
I’ve been to Buckingham Palace before for a couple of occasions – it was really special going with my mum and father-in-law to get my OBE.

It was incredibly empty for the VE Day recording. No one was there. It was really good but quite tricky doing this kind of work and keeping to social distancing guidelines.

The distancing affects the band members and the sound they make as a unit, yet the players on the night were so good they got over that problem straight

away. It was nice to meet Sophie [Raworth], Shane [Ritchie] and Emma [Barton]. I didn’t get to see anyone else as they made sure we all came and went at very different times to keep everyone safe.

I had to drive to the Palace ready in my suit – I didn’t even have make-up on, darling! It’s incredibly difficult for us actors when there’s no one to fuss over us – absolute nightmare!



Actor Adrian Lester impresses with his 27 rendition of *They Can’t Take That Away From Me* (left)





Wearing blue Suzanne Neville for the NHS, Katherine sings *We'll Meet Again* at the Palace (above and right), joined by a virtual Dame Vera Lynn (below), whom she has known and admired for many years (bottom)



**'I shed a tear during *We'll Meet Again*, when they went around the country to show other people joining in'**

## KATHERINE JENKINS

Mezzo-soprano Katherine performed at the Royal Albert Hall and also sang *We'll Meet Again* as a duet with Dame Vera Lynn, as well as *Over the Rainbow*, during her turn at the Palace.

It was a huge honour to play such a big part in VE Day. I was lucky enough to be involved in the 60th and 70th VE Day celebrations, so I've seen how important this day is for veterans and their families – and actually for all of us to stop and appreciate the sacrifices that were made so that we can live freely and peacefully as we do now.

This year was obviously very different – no audiences, no veterans. But with many of the VE Day 75 events cancelled, I'm just so happy we were able to mark and celebrate it. Both of the events I was involved in – Buckingham Palace and the Royal Albert Hall – were incredibly surreal and emotional.

I watched it from home when it was broadcast on TV, and shed a tear during *We'll Meet Again* when they went around the country to show other people joining in. It was a really special moment.

We showed it to our children the following morning. They love both the songs so they really enjoyed it. My daughter [Aaliyah, four] did make me laugh, though, when she asked: "Mummy, who are you singing to? For yourself? For fun?"

I've been singing *Over the Rainbow*

for many years and adore it as it's just such a hopeful song. I have amazing memories of singing it for our troops in Iraq and them all singing it with me – 4,000 men and women in an aircraft carrier in the middle of a war zone. It was a lump-in-the-throat moment.

And now, this song means even more: I think of the NHS rainbows and what it means to us all today.

*We'll Meet Again* is another of those amazing songs, full of hope and positivity. It resonates today as we are all missing our loved ones.

As always, it was a joy to sing this with Dame Vera Lynn. When we first met, on VE Day 60, she talked to me about going out to the troops. She told me her experiences and she inspired me to go out myself. I love her songs and the emotion she puts into them and so it's always an honour to duet with her.

It feels very special to have sung in the garden and the courtyard of Palace. As I arrived, my mind went back to those few happy summer days when we were in the garden for the Queen's coronation gala concerts to mark Her Majesty's 60th anniversary on the throne.

I hope the Queen and all those who remember VE Day felt that it was an appropriate way to celebrate this historic day. I hope it gave everyone a little bit of joy and feel together even if we are apart.





**'I hope the Queen  
and all those who  
remember VE Day felt  
it was an appropriate  
way to celebrate'**



Used to singing in sell-out concerts, playing at an empty Royal Albert Hall was a surreal experience for Katherine Jenkins. "My daughter asked: 'Mummy, who are you singing to? For yourself? For fun?'" she tells us