

Life *Almanac*

April arrives with that subtle, almost secretive shift we feel more than we see. Not a dramatic drumroll – more a soft suggestion that things are loosening. Days stretch, ideas stretch with them, and suddenly the world feels like it has a few more open doors than last month. You might feel drawn to a new place, a new book, a new class... or simply a new way of giving yourself 10 quiet minutes. April's reminder? Change doesn't have to shout to count.



Noted & noteworthy

April's Nature Marker: The subtle spring shift

April brings a quiet shift: the landscape starts to ease forward. Trees show the first murmurs of new life, buds rounding subtly, as though the branches are

ready to return to the world. Magnolia petals tighten with anticipation, blackthorn drifts into soft blossom, and catkins loosen themselves into movement again.

Even on the chillier days, there's a sense that the natural world is preparing for its reveal – not rushing, just steadily reclaiming colour and shape.

WORDS: CAROLINE BLIGHT & EMMA COXON. IMAGES: CHICO & RITA FOR ANIMATION IN LOVE; SEAMUS RYAN FOR MARIE & ROSETTA; OTHERS SUPPLIED; AND SHUTTERSTOCK.

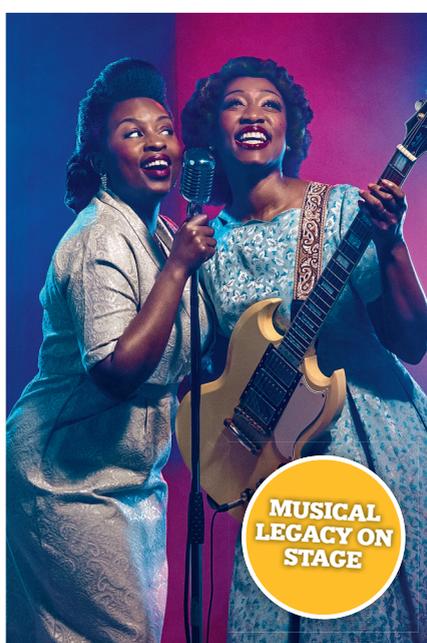
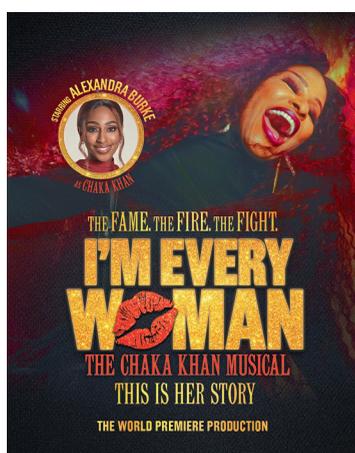
What's On: April Almanac

This month's Almanac gathers the kind of outings that add a spark to spring – the shows that stir something, the stories that stay with you, the small adventures that remind you that life is bigger than your to-do list. Think fresh ideas, good company and moments that coax you gently forward into the brighter months.

Musical masterpieces

Icons celebrated

This story of vocal powerhouse Chaka Khan reveals the woman behind the diva and charts her rise to stardom – with Alexandra Burke in the title role. Bold and touching, the production showcases her unwavering passion for civil rights, defiance in the face of a toxic music industry, battle with addiction and the juggle of being a working mother. 'Almost 17 years ago, I sang Chaka for my very first non-televised audition for The X Factor,' reveals Alexandra. 'To think that all these years later I've been given the opportunity to play the superstar in the West End would have been simply unimaginable for me back then.' *I'm Every Woman – The Chaka Khan Musical*, 5-28 March at The Peacock Theatre, London, then Coventry and later Eastbourne in April.



Beverly Knight plays Rosetta Tharpe alongside Ntombizodwa Ndlovu as Marie Knight in this thought-provoking play that highlights the incredible musical contribution both made to the evolution of popular music. Often called the 'godmother of rock'n'roll', Sister Rosetta influenced countless musicians from Elvis to Johnny Cash. 'Her legacy had long been overlooked in music history,' says Beverly. 'She deserves her place as one of the architects of rock'n'roll, a Gospel-singing, guitar-shredding heroine who helped to shape popular music as we know it today.' Featuring a wealth of joyous rock and gospel hits with live musicians, it's not to be missed.

Marie and Rosetta, @sohoplacetheatre, London, 28 Feb – 11 April.

TOP OF THE PODS

What's My Age Again?

Smart, candid and surprisingly joyful, Katherine Ryan takes midlife conversations out of the shadows. Guests talk ageing, identity and the odd curveball with humour and honesty. Perfect for a walk when you need both a laugh and a nudge of truth.



Mad, Sad and Bad

Paloma Faith chats through the messy parts of life with her usual charm and mischief. It's open, funny and wonderfully human – like debriefing with a friend who tells the truth kindly. A brilliant mood-setter for the day.



Aftermath: The Hunt for the Anthrax Killer A calm, gripping true-crime series that explains rather than sensationalises. It's thoughtful, steady and oddly soothing – the opposite of shouty crime podcasts. Perfect for curious minds who like their storytelling measured, not manic.





Seasonal Spotlight

Dawn chorus daybreaks

Every April, the mornings start to sing before we're fully awake. Blackbirds tuning up, robins clearing their throats, finches chiming in like they've been rehearsing all winter. This is peak dawn chorus season – nature's own surround sound. If you fancy a moment of real-world magic, take a thermos, step outside just after sunrise, and let the birds do what they do best: remind you that the world is still full of small, astonishing things. Or alternatively, head over to the RSPB's website and discover free dawn chorus recordings – pop them on while you ease into the day and you'll feel wrapped in woodland without leaving your duvet.

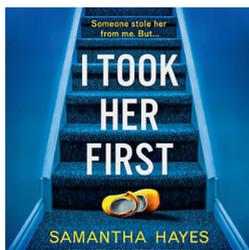
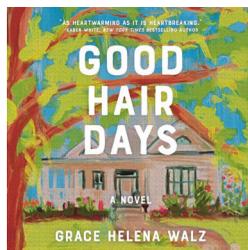


AUDIOBOOK SPOTLIGHT

Good Hair Days

by Grace Helena Walz

A funny, big-hearted story full of family tangles, reinvention and salon-chair wisdom. The audio performance gives it extra sparkle, making it feel like time spent with people you genuinely like. A lovely lift for low-energy days.



I Took Her First by Samantha Hayes

A smart, suspenseful mystery that pulls you in without weighing you down. The audiobook heightens the suspense just enough to make you lean in. Great company for a long walk or a weekend pottering session.

Picture of happiness

Drawing love

The Barbican kicks off a year-long series looking at how the magic and mystery of love has been captured through the art of animation. The theme of romance and finding love has been at the heart of animated cinema since Snow White longed for her prince to come. In a curated season, the power of animation to convey this universal theme, shown through films that capture the depth, richness and complexity of love, is explored. Going beyond fairytale romance, spanning decades and featuring films from around the world, the season examines our yearning for connection through stories of identity, community, passion and creativity.

Animation in Love, from 16 February, The Barbican, London

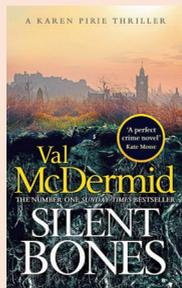




MUST-READS THIS MONTH

Silent Bones
by Val
McDermid
(Sphere)

A clever, quietly tense cold-case mystery with McDermid's usual wit and confidence. Karen Pirie navigates old secrets and new science with her trademark calm steel. A great lose-yourself-for-an-hour kind of read.



What Happened That Summer by Laura Pearson
(Boldwood Books)

A tender story about the secrets families tuck away and what happens when the truth finally taps you on the shoulder. Pearson has a gift for writing women as they really are – thoughtful, imperfect and easy to root for. A gentle page-turner with heart.



Bitter Honey
by Lola Akinmade
(William Morrow & Company)

A rich, multi-layered tale that moves effortlessly across decades and continents. It's about mothers, daughters, longing and identity – all told with warmth, colour and emotional depth. One of those books you'll want to carry from room to room.



FROM PAGE TO SCREEN

Forensic fans rejoice

Patricia Cornwell's iconic literary character is brought to life in this gripping eight-part series starring Nicole Kidman as Dr Kay Scarpetta. Using her unrivalled technical skill, she is determined to serve as the voice of the victims. This story is told across two timelines, from Scarpetta's early career as a chief medical examiner in the late 90s to the present day, when she returns to her hometown and resumes her former position while investigating a grisly murder. Jamie Lee Curtis plays Dorothy Farinelli, Scarpetta's sister, and Jamie and Nicole both serve as producers on this long-awaited series.

Scarpetta, 11 March, Prime Video



Religious revelations

The Shaker story

Many people don't know the extraordinary story of Ann Lee, one of the few female religious leaders of the 18th century, though most have heard of the Shakers. This film details how an illiterate Mancunian became a guiding force in the religion, known for worshiping through ecstatic song and physically expressive acts of devotion. 'The world doesn't know what an incredible woman Ann Lee was,' says Amanda Seyfried, who plays her. Haunted by personal tragedy yet driven by a firm belief in gender equality and communal living, devoted followers came to see her as the female embodiment of Christ. **The Testament of Ann Lee**, in cinemas from 20 February



Things to book, browse and look forward to

With winter finally loosening its grip, April is the moment to say yes to small pleasures again – a browse, a bite, a burst of live music. If you're ready for a little colour and buzz, here are a few spring treats well worth stepping out for.

1 IDEAL HOME SHOW, OLYMPIA LONDON 10–19 April

Olympia becomes Pinterest-in-real-life: interiors, gardens, gadgets you absolutely don't need but very much want, with room sets, live talks and everything from clever storage to wildly aspirational hot tubs. It's a fun way to gather ideas – even if your big renovation this year is 'one new lamp and a ruthless declutter'.
idealthomeshow.co.uk



2 DERBYSHIRE MAKES FESTIVAL Begins 11 April

A county-wide celebration of creativity, heritage and hands-on making, popping up across Derbyshire's most picturesque towns. Expect artisan workshops, open studios, performances, talks and local makers showing their craft in beautiful historic settings. It's relaxed, inspiring and the perfect excuse for a spring day out with a creative twist.
derbyshiremakes.co.uk

3 BRICK LANE JAZZ FESTIVAL, EAST LONDON 24–26 April

Three days of jazz, neo-soul, hip hop and electronic sounds across venues in and around Brick Lane. It's intimate enough to feel friendly, but big enough to make a proper weekend of it – with excellent food and people-watching between sets.
bricklanejazzfestival.com



4 PORTHLEVEN FOOD FESTIVAL, CORNWALL 24–26 April

A lively harbourside celebration of food, music and coastal culture – full of colour, flavour and that lovely "spring energy" feeling. Expect chef demos, excellent Cornish producers, wellness activities, craft stalls and evening events with a relaxed, sociable atmosphere. It's a brilliant long-weekend option if you enjoy good food, sea air and just a touch of adventure.
porthlevenfoodfestival.com



Mindful Moment

A pocket ritual for April

Next time you boil the kettle, use the waiting time as a mini reset:

1. Stand by a window, feet planted, shoulders relaxed.
2. Name three things you can see that mean “newness”: a leaf bud, a post-winter paint job, the first washing line of the year swaying in the breeze.
3. Decide on one tiny thing you’ll do today that’s just for you – read a chapter of your favourite book, a walk, a phone call, a nap.

Nothing dramatic, just a reminder: you’re allowed to be on your own list.

This Month in History

25 April 1953: A Moment That Changed Everything

Watson and Crick’s paper announcing the discovery of DNA’s double-helix structure was published in *Nature*, marking one of the most significant scientific breakthroughs of the century. A quiet April moment that changed how we understand life itself – proof that world-shifting ideas don’t always arrive with fanfare.

The bright side

Time well spent

Volunteers across the UK still give an estimated £25 billion a year in time, care and energy*.

Informal neighbours’ help (shopping, calls, little lifts) keeps community life humming – and for many, that quiet kindness can make all the difference. If you’re curious about getting involved, visit volunteersweek.org.

A little time, a lot of good.



WORDS OF WISDOM

‘Nothing can dim the light which shines from within’

Maya Angelou

*SOURCE: DEPARTMENT FOR CULTURE, MEDIA & SPORT RESEARCH 2023 (PUBLISHED VIA CIVIL SOCIETY NEWS), ESTIMATING THE ANNUAL VALUE OF FORMAL VOLUNTEERING IN ENGLAND.

