

Rochdale's weekly Midday Music Toad Lane Concerts at St Mary in the Baum Church in December 2025

December at the Toad Lane Concerts offered a moving and richly varied sequence of performances, marked by remembrance, international celebration, and a warmly received homecoming.



The month opened on 3 December with a poignant tribute to Peter Collier (left), the late harpsichordist and director of the Telemann Baroque Ensemble. With the blessing of Collier's widow Pam, the surviving members honoured his memory by fulfilling the planned engagement (below). Flautist Alastair Roberts led Haydn and Mozart flute quartets with expressive clarity, while Prof Roger Bisby introduced Telemann works that Collier had personally recommended should the ensemble ever need to perform without him. Though the

personally recommended should the ensemble ever need to perform without him. Though the harpsichord part was inevitably absent, the strength of the ensemble's playing, their unity, and the affection with which they spoke of their colleague created a fitting and deeply felt memorial. The group, long regarded as the venue's unofficial TLC "house band," hopes to continue Collier's legacy in future seasons.

On 10 December, the award-winning vocal ensemble Voci Voices returned for a Christmas gala that filled St Mary in the Baum with colour, warmth, and international flair. With performers whose roots span Poland, Ghana, Ukraine, Scotland, and Wales, supported by the versatile English pianist Jonathan Ellis, the programme moved from Broadway-style seasonal medleys to a global



tapestry of carols. Austrian, African, Ukrainian, Polish, Italian, French, Welsh, and American traditions were woven together, culminating in a vibrant arrangement of *Hallelujah! Joy to the World*. Their encore, John Rutter's *I Wish You Christmas*, sealed the concert's joyful spirit and set a festive tone for the season.

The month concluded on 17 December with the return of Alfred Anderson, the Australian-based baritone who grew up in



Milnrow and sang in the first Rochdale Youth Music Festival in 1963. His 10,534-mile journey back to "Blighty" was warmly welcomed by an audience that remembered him fondly. Anderson offered a programme spanning Handel, Vaughan Williams, and musical theatre, accompanied by Dr Joe Dawson, the TLC series director and long-time champion of local musical life. Their collaboration, rooted in shared history, was enriched by Dawson's partly improvised interlude, *Alf's Medley – from Blighty to Oz*, using English Country Gardens, Nimrod, via the theme music for British Airways to Waltzing Matilda and Kookaburra!



Together, the December concerts showcased the breadth of the Toad Lane Concerts series: its commitment to heritage ensembles, its embrace of global musical traditions, and its celebration of artists whose journeys, whether across continents or across decades, continue to shape Rochdale's musical community.

Alan Rawsterne