

Toad Lane Concerts at St Mary in the Baum Church in May Sopranos and other Nightingales with violin and new compositions

May 07: Margaret Ferguson soprano & Maria King piano – two extraordinary performers, popular regular soloists at St Mary in the Baum. Both are highly trained and able to cross the apparent divide between serious and popular music. To have them together in one recital was terrific. Lehar, Boncini, Bellini, Verdi, plus Arne and Handel were complemented by lighter repertoire with The Pipes of Pan, Can't Help Lovin' dat



Man from Showboat (where a real blues feel came through) and the hysterical One Meat Ball by Zaret and Singer - a captivating number not a usual bedfellow with the classic soprano repertoire! But Margaret embraced that too. Finally, (by request), the hilarious Alto's Lament by Goldrich brought the house down.

May 14: The Nightingale Singers founded in 1987, are based in Middleton. Since 2004 they have been directed by Ken Greaves, and during this time have performed in the North of England, Midlands and North Wales. This was a packed mixed programme of popular numbers and more serious ones from throughout the history of music, some sung a capella (unaccompanied). Fine soloists Alyson Brailsford and Jennifer Workman, Liz Creagh, Freda Farnworth and Martin McLoughlin also stepped forward from the choir, well supported by piano accompanist Brian Mulligan, who also sings in the tenor section. Today's presenter was Suzanne Mather.



May 21: Louise Taylor soprano and Jonathan Ellis piano ... Mendelssohn's opening aria, Hear Ye, Israel from Elijah, O for the Wings of a Dove and On Wings of Song were all comfortably within her grasp.



Then operetta songs from The Land of Smiles by Franz Lehar, a role relished along with the same composer's Vilia, from The Merry Widow.

She was partnered today by award-winning pianist Jonathan Ellis who works extensively around the NW as soloist, accompanist, repetiteur, and chamber musician. Not only did he accompany superbly but also gave piano solos from his early days - Valse in A Flat Major, Op 69, no 1 by Chopin and The Rustle of Spring by Sinding, played with affection and panache.

Their final set was devoted to songs by George Gershwin culminating in Summertime from his magnificent all-black opera, Porgy and Bess

May 28: Dmitra Ananiadou violin and Richard Whalley piano ... two sophisticated exponents presented a superb duo recital of Manuel de Falla's Danse Espagnol, Ravel's Pièce en forme de Habanera, Richard Whalley's own Butterflies, Alex Apostolopoulos' Rhapsodia Alpha (composer in the audience), and Beethoven's Violin Sonata Op 23. Flavours of Spain (also by a Frenchman), Greece and Britain and Austro-German dedicated to a Russian Tsar! A fascinating world tour united by brilliant playing and communication. Contemporary music brought our 1935 heritage Challen piano successfully into the 21st century.



The Queen's Award-winning Toad Lane Concerts are every Wednesday at 12.30 pm at St Mary in the Baum, Toad Lane, Rochdale, OL16 1DZ. Entrance fee is £6. Contact 01706 648872 for further information.

Dr Joe Dawson