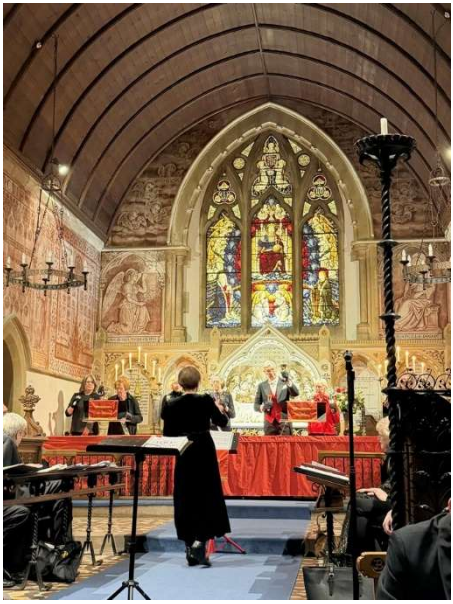
Music and Merriment 6 December 2025

These articles were published in the Winkfield parish mag for Jan. 2026

Introduction



This community concert took place in St Mary's church with a good audience, and featured children's and adult choirs, organ and instrumental support, St Mary's Handbell ringers, readers and entertainers, not to mention mince pies and mulled wine in the interval. Two brilliant child musicians displayed astonishing talent.

It was a wonderful evening. One Junior Choir parent wrote: "thank you ... for creating such a fabulous night of music and celebration. It's the highlight of our year!"

This description of the Music and Merriment concert was published in the Winkfield Parish Mag of January 2026

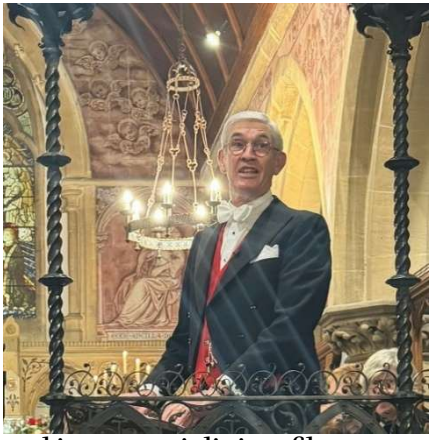
Music and Merriment

The Music and Merriment Christmas Concert took place on the evening of 6 December. It was billed as 'a unique concert celebrating local talent' – and it lived up to this magnificently. A Junior Choir mother wrote: "It was such a fabulous night of music and celebration. It's the highlight of our year! My daughter loves being involved, thank you so much for including her in the Junior Choir."

The concert is inspired by the joy of Christmas, and singing is at the core, with a junior choir of children specially trained for the event, a senior choir of experienced local singers, and an enthusiastic audience who join in on the audience carols. But there is more: the St Mary's handbell ringers, local readers and entertainers; an organist supports the singers, and a well-known local brass quintet adds its own flavour to the music, not only in the carols, but with its own characteristic

Christmas music. All under control by our experienced compère Tony Bish.

Perhaps of most significance is a unique contribution to local talent: each year we give a performance-opportunity for super-talented young instrumentalists and singers; and, in past performers, we have even had a then-future winner of the BBC Young Musician of the Year (Ewan Millar, oboist).



Over the last eight years we have been blessed by having Sarah

Aizawa, aged just 17, a violinist of huge talent and technique that we have seen (and heard) grow in technique year by year. She played the virtuosic Prokofiev 1st Violin concerto, combining lyrical sensitivity with the daunting technique demanded by the composer's novel sound-world – amazing complex music flowing from one so young.

Sarah was sensitively supported by pianist John Sayer, who did a great job in emulating the orchestra that accompanies soloists in real concerto performances – it's a job with a real challenge, both technically and in supporting the changing moods of the solo part.

We welcomed for the first time 12-year-old Sergey Druzhinin, who played a Rachmaninov prelude characterised by a complex lyrical lower part accompanied by a fast flurry of upper notes like a cloud. His teasing but high-speed

jazzed-up Alla Turca (originally by Mozart) was hilarious while stunning in technique.

Both of these amazing young musicians have a bright musical future in serious musical venues, but both treasure the opportunity to entertain and be acclaimed by a really friendly audience like this. It is not easy at this time in their career to find occasions where they will be so welcomed, and it is a joy for the audience, too, to experience young talent at this level before it blossoms into professional success and, with luck, fame.

We had a Junior Choir of 15 girls from six different local schools, all but one primary schools. The parents apply to have their children included in the choir – no audition needed – and on four Sunday evenings in November, the JC Director Lucy Head trains them to sing with clear confidence. The children rose magnificently to the challenge!

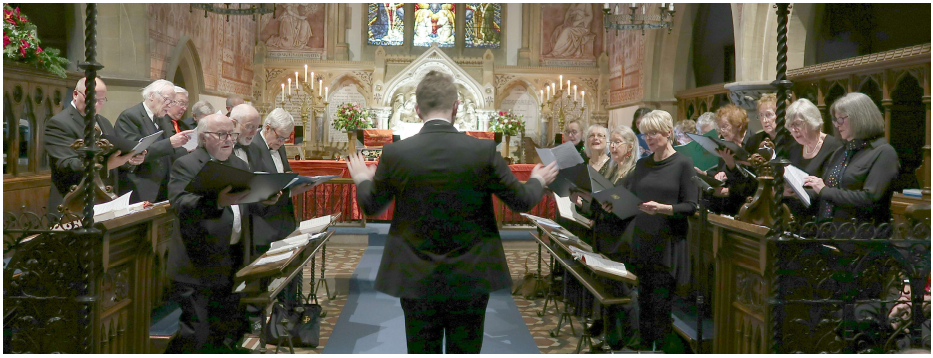
The Junior Choir, as always, started the concert by processing up the darkened church singing 'Once in royal David's city', lit only by their glowsticks, led by Lucy. They neatly established themselves on the chancel steps for the second verse, after which the Senior Choir sang a verse under William Bishop, the SC director, followed by the last two verses for the audience.

The concert was on, and the carol ended with a glorious descant and the bright trumpets of the 5Ts Brass quintet soaring over everybody's

enthusiastic singing. The JC later gave a lively and beautifully sung mini-recital of, from celebrating stars, finding Jesus, and the days of the Christmas season. The children, in two groups, sang their counterpoint with effective confidence. They later contributed two solo verses to 'The first Nowell'.

Eila, manager of the Senior Choir, wrote after the concert: "The atmosphere was lovely and the Junior Choir were the star attraction, plus of course the young pianist and violinist." Len Tyler, 5Ts director and a senior local musician wrote: " To give those youngsters such a lovely experience is something that will stay with them for life, and that is something that nobody can take away. What a great legacy!"

The Senior Choir, under William, played a core role in the audience carols, supported instrumentally by Alan Rapley on the organ and the 5Ts brass quintet, and the last of these was the glorious 'Joy to the World'; and, again, our ears rang with descant and high trumpets. The middle audience carol was 'The 12 days of Christmas' and the two sides of the audience bobbed up and down energetically for the odd and even bizarre gifts from the 'true love' The senior choir was excused the bobbing – to the relief of the older members!



The Senior Choir in its own contribution sang out the Christmas message, starting with Anthony Hodson's new anthem – a setting of Robert Louis Stevenson's 'A prayer for Christmas Day' (only its second public performance), they also sang three joyous and familiar carols from the Choir repertoire. 'We wish you a merry Christmas' was their final accomplished message to a delighted audience!

The St Mary's Handbells are always an important part of the concert, and, under the capable baton of Jill Glennerster, they gave a very polished rendition of three carols as the last number of the first half of the concert. They perform just in front of the altar, and the atmosphere of their performance is magical. This is the epitome of inclusive parish music – parishioners working together as a team, learning new skills as they learn new pieces, and entertaining us all with their achievements.

In between the set-pieces of the choirs and the instrumentalists, we have the readers and the entertainers. John Kimbell explained why he wanted a hippopotamus for Christmas, John Edwards told Hoffnung's sad but funny up-and-down tale of the bricklayer and his painful encountering of a tiresome barrel of bricks on a tall building, Caroline Loveys took us through C.S Lewis's Wardrobe to a magical world, and Sue Bish entertained with 'Another night before Christmas', the moving word-world of Carol-Anne Duffy (past poet laureate).

The 5Ts Brass quintet entertained with Len Tyler's inventive Christmas sound world, including a rendition of the drama of a Cluedo adventure in an imagined Christmas-tide game.

And at 'half-time', we all enjoyed the Women's Guild's delicious mince pies, washed down by mulled wine, kindly donated by Margaret-Anne, together with the community pleasure of talking together after the moment-by-moment enjoyment of the first half.

We have been very lucky in having photographic and video-clip contributions from two Junior Choir parents, Suki and Kiaya, and the concert's web page presents these. Thank you very much to both of them. Kiaya's words sum up the concert in a way that would give joy to any organiser of such a complex event:

"Wow! What a fabulous extravagant talent filled evening last night was. Everybody involved, whether organising or performing, should be so proud of the Music and Merriment concert. The child musicians especially were breathtaking in their performances. I thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of it."

Putting together a concert like this is a big team effort, and well over 60 people played a role, including singers and other performers and directors, and not forgetting people behind the scenes, including our wonderful kitchen people and those who have assisted with our parish publicity and social media outreach.

Many have taken part year on year, and will be happy to go on doing it. We have also been helped by sponsorship of costs, and by being able to use the Friends of St Mary's website for publicity and communications.

A million thanks to all these wonderful enthusiastic people who made the concert work, as well as the St Mary's Women's Guild for their lovely mince pies that powered the concert interval

And we must warmly also thank the wonderful audience for coming out on a cold winter night (fortunately not raining) expecting great entertainment. The concert was designed to be a great treat, not only for parish people, but also for supporters further afield, and it was good to have support from these lovely people. All the same, we are primarily supported by parish people and we loved entertaining you, our fellow parishioners. The concert will have made nearly £2000 for St Mary's.

We look forward to another great evening like this in 2026!