

Remembering Roger Hayward: A Concert Dedicated to a Remarkable Life

Monday 17 November, 2025

Sheffield Chamber Orchestra's concert on 29 November will be dedicated to the memory of Roger Hayward, who passed away in October 2025 at the age of almost 97. Roger's connection to the orchestra runs deep: he was not only the first Chairman of the ensemble — then known as the University Chamber Orchestra — but also one of its longest-serving and most devoted players.

Roger arrived in Sheffield to study Metallurgy at the university, bringing his violin with him and a determination to keep music at the heart of his life. Under the direction of Professor Stuart Deas, the fledgling orchestra took shape, and Roger's commitment helped lay the foundations for what would become Sheffield Chamber Orchestra. It was there, among the second violins, that he met Kathleen Gabbitts. Their shared musicianship turned into shared lives: they married in 1955, raised three children, and somehow — even amid family life and busy careers — found the time to rehearse every week and perform in concert after concert.

Roger played with the orchestra for at least 50 years, a remarkable legacy of loyalty and musicianship. Kathleen stepped back earlier, but remained part of the SCO family, attending concerts and helping wherever needed. Even after both eventually retired from performing, their love of classical music continued; they became familiar faces at concerts across Sheffield, particularly at the Crucible Theatre.

Beyond music, Roger loved family life — enriched by five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren — and enjoyed walking throughout the beautiful landscapes of the region. Following Kathleen's death in 2022, Roger spent his final years in a retirement home, still carrying with him the warmth, curiosity, and generosity of spirit that endeared him to so many.

As we prepare for our November concert, we remember Roger with deep gratitude. His enthusiasm, dedication, and quiet leadership helped shape the orchestra we are today. It is a privilege to honour his memory at this performance.

Roger Hayward: violinist, chairman, founder, friend. Thank you for everything.

The orchestra's next concert celebrates its 75th anniversary as well as the life of Roger Hayward, and takes place at 7.30pm on Saturday 29th November at All Saints Church, Ecclesall, featuring works by Mendelssohn, Wagner and Telemann, and the world première of a new piece by British composer Dominic McGonigal.

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