

At last it's here! The Gower Festival 2019 has arrived and today we are at St Peter's church, Newton. There are still one or two tickets left, so if you now find that you would like tickets please try The Grand Theatre box office this morning or there should be some available on the door this evening.

On Wednesday we will be at the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery for the third and final concert by the Conchord Ensemble. On Wednesday they will be performing Mozart's Flute Quartet in C (K 285b); his Quintet for Oboe and Strings in c minor (K 406/516b) and his Clarinet Quintet in A (K 581). This is a special concert to honour the 95th birthday of the artist Glenys Cour. Some of Glenys's works from the permanent collection of the gallery will be displayed in the atrium. The concert begins at 6.45pm with a pre-concert drinks reception at the Gallery, which is included in the cost of the ticket.

As of this morning, the seated area of the concert is sold out, but there are still a few tickets as 'promenaders' in the gallery over-looking the performance area.

There are toilet facilities at the Gallery, and parking is in the streets and car parks near the Gallery.

This concert is being sponsored by Arthur Llewellyn Jenkins, to whom we are very grateful.

And now for the first time this year, it's over to the Mumbling Maestro of Mumbles:

Monday - July 1

*"Beethoven's last quartets were written by a deaf man and should only be listened to by a deaf man."* - Thomas Beecham

Hello! This is the "Musical Maestro of Mumbles" and it's nice to be back and mumbling a few random, daft, controversial, hopefully humorous and thought provoking facts - about the 2019 Gower Festival.

Right, I'm going to start each daily mumbling with a quote from someone famous and as you can see, today it's a little gem from Thomas Beecham. Some quotes will be funny and some will be almost serious.

Next year is the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth and so 2020 is the year to get "Beethovened" out - therefore, I won't mumble about Ludwig this year. The mention above is all he's getting. Instead, I'm going to mumble a tale today about a composer - another one of the famous "B"s - whose work we can hear in the Gower Festival's opening concert - and that's Brahms.

Now, falling in love with someone else's spouse isn't a wise thing. It causes emotional turmoil and bags of angst but with Brahms it also spurred the composing of some very Romantic music. For most of his adult life, Brahms carried a torch (quite a sizeable torch - apparently) for Mrs. Clara Schumann, the wife of his friend, mentor and fellow composer Robert Schumann. In a letter to her he wrote: "I can do nothing but think of you. What have you done to me? Can't you remove the spell you have cast over me?" (Heavy stuff). Clara was 14 years older than Johannes (That was Brahms' christian name). She was married to the composer Robert Schumann and they had seven children. For more than a year Robert, who suffered with severe mental problems had been committed to an asylum and she had not been allowed to visit him. Brahms had hastened to her side to "help out" (Yeah - right!).

So, here's the situation - Brahms was living with Clara and her children whilst Robert Schumann was locked away in an asylum. Brahms' bedroom was on a separate floor (of course it was!) and he spent most of his time consoling her, mowing the lawn, doing a bit of light dusting, shopping, helping with the children and apparently going nearly out of his mind with yearning. In those years Brahms was slim, beardless and drop-dead handsome. (the gossipers in the local Bierkeller were having a field day). Clara was yearning too and as with Brahms, her feelings were tangled up with anxiety and guilt.

Robert died in 1856, whereupon Brahms and Clara were free to declare their passion and to marry. The couple went on holiday to Switzerland to sort it all out. Sadly, their holiday wasn't all "fun up in the Alps". Exactly what happened we'll never know but it amounted to this: Brahms got up one morning towards the end of their holiday and told Clara "See you then. I'm off to Hamburg" and that's what he did! (what a cad!)

Clara went home alone and heartbroken. She wrote in her diary: "I felt as if I were returning from a funeral" (She was so upset she even forgot to get a bar of Toblerone for the kids - so they weren't happy either) As for Brahms - if he wouldn't marry Clara, then neither would he marry anybody else. In his heart he could never leave Clara, nor she him. For the rest of their lives they would maintain their strange but inescapable connection. They spent holidays together (Yes) They hugged and kissed (Go on) but apparently their love was never consummated (Oh). It was hardly a question of Brahms being uninterested in sex - far from it - he

was famously devoted, nay addicted, to the services of “the ladies of the night”. When he was without Clara he was grumpy and curmudgeonly. When Clara was without him she was sad.

Brahms’ Piano Quartet No. 3 (NB not the one we hear in the opening concert) was a work he began around 1854, an especially turbulent period in this relationship. Twenty years later, when it was finally finished, Brahms wrote to his publisher: “On the cover you must have a picture, namely a head with a pistol being held to it. I’ll send you my photograph for the purpose and since you seem to like colour printing, you can use blue coat, yellow breeches and top-boots.” That garb was favoured by Young Werther, the Romantic hero in a novel by Goethe, who commits suicide after falling in love with a married woman! (Ah, that’s so romantic!)

Tomorrow I’ll be mostly mumbling about the availability and popularity of music.

Mumbling Maestro of Mumbles