

Another wonderful concert yesterday afternoon by the Conchord Ensemble. Their last concert with us will be this evening at the Glyn Vivian Art Gallery. If you don't have a ticket and would now like to come, there will be some on the door as 'promenaders' and there may be some returns for seating in the performance area.

If you have tickets, don't forget that the evening starts at 6.45pm with drinks, which is included in your ticket price.

On Friday we visit The Worm's Head Hotel at Rhossili at 3pm for **Cream tea...and crime!** This event is a sell-out.

Parking is in the National Trust Car Park right next door to the hotel. If you are a National Trust member, please remember to bring your membership card as you will need to scan it at the ticket machine to obtain free parking. Otherwise it costs £2.50 or £5 depending on how long you are parking for. Don't forget to lock your car and take all valuables with you. We don't want to have to get Swansea CID out to investigate a crime!

Cathy Ace was born in Swansea and is from a Gower family. Her latest book 'The Wrong Boy' is set in Rhossili. I don't know if you have read the book, and I don't want to give the plot away, but when I knew that Cathy was coming to talk to us, I bought the book and read it. I had never read a Cathy Ace book before, but I was fascinated by the way the main characters narrate the story in turn, giving their perspective on events that occur. I also enjoyed seeing how many places that she wrote about I knew. It promises to be a revealing afternoon.

And now to the Mumbling Maestro of Mumbles.....

"Lesser artists borrow, great artists steal." - Stravinsky

Did you know that Mahler was happily married? Unfortunately, Mrs. Mahler was not! Musicians and composers in particular, don't have an enviable track record when it comes to love and marriage (Perhaps "enviable" is the wrong word - depending on your point of view of course. A few of them did get into situations that some might consider eminently enviable. Read on and decide.....).

Take the case of Ralph Vaughan Williams. He was endearingly called "Uncle Ralph" by dozens of nubile, young, female singers and he didn't object in the least when they lined up to hug him and give him admiring kisses after concerts. (I bet he didn't). There are stories of him lumbering up the stairs to the top floor of the Royal College of Music, where a pretty young music student was practising the violin and he'd stare at her longingly through the window. (That's up five floors and those stairs are steep. He was in his 60s; she'd have heard him wheezing his way up the last flight and known he was outside. Staring through the window was probably the best he could manage after that climb).

On one occasion, the beautiful pianist Harriet Cohen asked him to write her a piano concerto. He agreed to the commission - "in return for 10,000 kisses". (Apparently she paid off the 'debt' - with interest). Such flirtations were always half in jest (and half not!).

Vaughan Williams (RVW) was married to Adeline Fisher but it wasn't a passionate marriage. There were no children and from the start, he'd been frustrated by his wife's obsessive devotion to her extensive family. Then, just as RVW was resigning himself to old age, into his life stepped the beautiful and youthful presence of Ursula Wood - a young drama student at the Old Vic. She was absolutely besotted with him. He was 65, she was 27. (he must have thought all his birthdays had come at once). Ursula wrote to RVW persistently and eventually persuaded him to take her out to lunch. She recalled how they were returning from that lunch in a London cab when: "Ralph suddenly grabbed me in his arms and gave me a terrific kiss" (he must have ordered the oysters) She said: "Waw, I'm not used to this!" He said: "You soon will be!" (Ah, the old 'soon will be' routine eh!).

Their affair began shortly afterwards (probably about half an hour afterwards). Apparently the forty year age difference was no problem when it came to igniting his spark of desire. (really!). Vaughan Williams was so taken with Ursula's beauty and vitality that he was inspired to write his uplifting *Serenade To Music*. However, to complicate matters, Ursula was also married, to Army officer Michael Wood. Nevertheless, their passion flourished, though it remained frustrated by the presence

of their respective spouses. Ursula even confided in friends that she'd had an abortion at this time – the identity of the father was never made clear (well - that says it all).

Then, one afternoon, whilst Ursula was “entertaining” (!!) Ralph in her London flat, a telegram arrived with the news that her husband had died on Army duty. RVW's response was as swift as it was surprising, he took Ursula home to his house in Dorking, where he and Adeline would look after the grieving widow. (Oh, come on! p-lease). Outwardly, the pretence was maintained. Family and most friends thought Ursula was simply a young acquaintance of the couple. In reality, it was an unusual but mutually agreeable ‘ménage à trois’. The three of them even slept side by side in the same bed!. (Hmm. I'm sure that was fun – I bet there were ‘His’ & ‘Hers’ false teeth glasses each side of the bed, and at least RVW didn't need a hot water bottle). So, this unusual (to say the least) arrangement continued until Adeline's death in 1951, when Vaughan Williams was finally free to wed his long-term ‘assistant’.

Mind you, this isn't as dramatic a story as that of Carlo Gesualdo (March 30, 1566 - September 8, 1613) He was an Italian composer, noted for his madrigals. (spoken of in awe by those that saw them). In 1586 he married his first cousin, the twice-widowed Maria d'Avalos, who was several years older than he (you can already tell that this will end in tears). She bore a son and not long thereafter embarked on an affair with Fabrizio Carafa, Duca d'Andria (She called him “Fab”, she was often heard shouting “Oh-Fab”). Informed of her infidelity, Gesualdo laid a trap and with the help of friends, and murdered his wife and her lover in bed. Not surprisingly, the double murder caused a spot of scandal but because such revenge was in keeping with the social code of the day, Gesualdo was not charged with murder. When his father died in 1591, Ges (as his murderous mates called him) assumed the title of “Prince of Venosa”. (It was obviously ‘who you know’ and ‘wheels within wheels’ even way back then).

It would be remiss of me not to mark the 150th anniversary of Hector Berlioz's death in my mumblings this year and here's a perfect opportunity to so do. In 1830, the 26-year-old Berlioz fell in love with an adorable 18-year-old pianist named Camille Molke. Within a month they were unofficially engaged and Hector went to the house to meet Camille's Mam (Mrs Molke), who unfortunately had other ideas. She proceeded to put Berlioz through more hoops than a circus dog, finally packing him off to Rome to compose an opera “worthy of her daughter”. Soon after arriving in Rome, Berlioz received a letter from Mrs Molke informing him that Camille had married a rich geezer and that he - Berlioz - should quit causing trouble and GET OVER IT.

We get the opportunity to hear some of Saint-Saëns' wonderful music in the Gower Festival this year, so I'll finish today with a tale about the private life of Camille Saint-Saëns, which was filled with turmoil (now there's a surprise). He was decidedly ‘light on his feet’ but realized that marrying would bolster his reputation. So, in 1875, at the age of almost 40, he began an affair with nineteen year old Marie-Laure Truffot, which led to marriage. (apparently the age gap made no difference - yeah yeah - what is it with these composers?). Immediately after their wedding, Saint-Saëns declared that he was too busy for a honeymoon and took Marie straight home to live with his Mam - Mrs Saint-Saëns senior. Thereafter Camille Saint-Saëns (or “Cam” as he was known to his mates - more of whom later) had little time for Marie but they did have two children. Sadly, tragedy intervened when both children died within six weeks of each other in 1878. Saint-Saëns blamed Marie for the children's deaths and a short time later he walked out on her for good. There was no divorce and Marie never saw him again. (so she went home to her Mam).

Apparently, Saint-Saëns was a solitary and secretive cove and was prone to disappearing for weeks at a time. On the plus side he was a remarkably good host and was renowned for it. He enjoyed entertaining friends lavishly at his Paris home, where his after dinner performances in drag were legendary - the talk of Gay Paree. (well, it's nice to have a hobby). He's reputed to have danced *The Sugar Plum Fairy*, dressed in nothing but a ballerina's tutu, for the entertainment of fellow composer Tchaikovsky when he came round for dinner. (Well, whatever ‘floats your boat’ eh? Let's draw a discreet veil over proceedings at this point - which presumably is exactly what they did!).

Tomorrow I shall be mostly mumbling about Music in America - NB not American music.

Mumbling Maestro of Mumbles