

Last night's concert left me speechless. Christian Li's mastery of the violin and his musical maturity at age only 11 is absolutely phenomenal! His fingers flew over the violin and his final piece by Bazzini drew the whole audience to its feet in a standing ovation which was only halted when he and Gordon played the Chopin Nocturne again as an encore. I am sure we will hear much more from this young man - and don't forget - you heard him first at the Gower Festival!

On to today; we have Cathy Ace at the Worm's Head Hotel in Rhossili. This event is sponsored by Cover-to-Cover, the Mumbles bookshop, and we are very grateful for their support. This event is a sell-out. Parking is in the National Trust car park in Rhossili, and as I mentioned in my earlier email, please remember to lock your car and take all valuables with you as there have been some car break-ins in the area. Also, if you are a National Trust member, please take your membership card for free parking, otherwise the cost is £2.50 or £5 depending on how long you park for.

I forgot to mention on yesterday's email that all proceeds from tomorrow's Children's Concert will be donated to 'Save the Children'. So if you can get along to this concert, please do. You will not only be supporting our local children as they develop as musicians, but also needy children elsewhere.

On Sunday we take a well-earned rest from our concerts, so enjoy a rest before we move into our second week of what is proving to be an outstanding festival.

If you would like to support the Gower Festival even more than you already do, you might like to consider joining the 100 Club. The cost is just £12 per share per year (you can take out more than one share if you would like to). There are three draws a year. The first will take place just after the end of this year's festival, the second in November and the last one in March. At each draw there are a first prize of £100; a second prize of £50 and two prizes of £25. Last year the 100 Club raised over £600 for the Gower Festival - a significant contribution towards the cost of a concert. If you are interested please pick up a form from me at the entrance to any Festival venue or email me at friends@gowerfestival.org and I will be happy to send you a form.

Now let's go over to the Mumbling Maestro of Mumbles for today's mumblings.....

"Wagner's music is better than it sounds" - Mark Twain

Friday will be fun. It's a chance to meet the hugely successful author Cathy Ace and enjoy a cream tea. Cathy writes Murder Mysteries and she collects awards and prizes galore for them. I thought I'd stay with the grim and gruesome aspect of murder, mystery and mayhem, of which Cathy writes so well. Today's mumblings are 'darker' than usual.

Let me tell you firstly about the composer Richard Strauss. In 1949 whilst lying on his deathbed, he turned to his beloved daughter-in-law and said: "It's a funny thing, Alice. Dying is just the way I envisaged it in *Death and Transfiguration*." If you've never heard it - *Death and Transfiguration* is a musical depiction of an artist on his deathbed, reviewing his life in art between bouts of an eventually fatal fever. (all jolly toe-tapping stuff).

The Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg suffered a serious heart attack and it prompted him to write his String Trio. He told his friends that it was a musical representation of that coronary incident and its subsequent medical treatment. Apparently, the middle section is meant to depict the penetration of a hypodermic needle into the heart! (I don't think I'll be rushing out anytime soon to buy a copy of this!)

Here are the stories of nine composers who met their demise in an unusual manner, which I'm sure Cathy might like and possibly use as inspiration:-

1. **Anton von Weber** was shot in 1945 by an American Army soldier whilst "nipping outside for a fag". He lit a cigarette outside his flat, unaware of there being a curfew in force for that part of occupied Austria.
2. **Charles Valentin Alkan** died in 1888 from pulling down a heavy coat and umbrella rack on himself.
3. In 1899, **Ernest Chausson** rode his bike down a hill and was killed when he went smack into a brick wall.
4. **Jean-Baptiste Lully** died from gangrene when his foot got infected after he'd struck it with a conducting baton during a performance.

5. **Alessandro Stradella** was murdered in the street by a hitman who was never brought to justice. The reason for his death was perhaps his infidelities. He wasn't discreet, they were widely known about.

6. **Alban Berg**. An insect sting was the undoing of this Austrian composer. The sting gave rise to a spot on his back which was painful and, since the family were poor, his wife attempted a home operation using a pair of scissors. As a result, Berg died from blood poisoning on Christmas Eve.

7. **Jean Marie Leclair** was separated from his second wife in 1758. It was all a bit messy, unpleasant and costly so he was forced to move into a bachelor pad in a rough neighbourhood of Paris. There, he was stabbed to death. The murderer was never found.

8. **Enrique Granados** At the height of his success in 1916, he was crossing the English Channel by ferry and the ship he was in got hit by a torpedo from a German U-boat. Granados drowned after he jumped out of his lifeboat in a valiant but futile attempt to save his wife.

Finally - here's one that almost could have come from Miss Ace's pen:-

9. **Claude Vivier** was fatally stabbed through the heart in his Montreal apartment. On the piano was the manuscript of his final but incomplete work, which was a song called *Do You Believe in the Immortality of the Soul?*. The lyrics tell the story of a Canadian composer taking a journey on the Montreal Metro. During the trip he met a young man and invited him back to his flat for a drink. The unfinished composition ends abruptly with the words "Then he removed a dagger from his jacket and stabbed me through the heart." (ooooh creepy or what?!) The murderer has not been caught.

Next week I'll tell you some facts about Scriabin who also had a whacky death.

Enjoy your cream tea in lovely Rhossili on Friday.

Tomorrow I shall be mostly mumbling about the piano and everything to do with it.

Mumbling Maestro of Mumbles