

I hope you all enjoyed your day of rest yesterday. We took note from the Maestro's mumblings and in the afternoon visited one of the studios open for the Gower Open Studios. We had a fantastic welcome, and also saw some other Gower Festival Friends there. If you haven't been to any of these they are well worth a visit. You will find further details on page 44 of your programme.

Today we have the Live Music Now concert at Siloam Chapel in Killay at 2.30pm. This concert has been sponsored by Sir Karl and Lady Jenkins; we are very grateful for their support. We are also grateful to Sir Karl for agreeing to become the new president of the Gower Festival. Edwina Hart has decided that she no longer wishes to continue in that post though she is continuing on the committee, and we are very grateful to her for taking the post when John-Hugh Thomas felt it was time to vacate the role.

Also today we have Griff Harries talking about the Festival on S4C at 1pm on the programme 'Prynhawn Da'. Do tune in and listen to what he has to say if you can.

On Wednesday we visit St Paul's Church, Sketty, for a visit by the ever-popular Ji Liu. He will be performing pieces by Debussy, Beethoven, Ravel and Stravinsky as well as Etude No 1 (2018) written by Ji Lui himself. There is a large car park at St Paul's as well as parking on the streets around the area. This concert is sponsored by Brian and Margaret Clarkson and we are very grateful for their support once again.

Now, without further ado, I will hand you over to the Mumbling Maestro of Mumbles (though I am not sure I agree with all his mumblings today, being the mother of a harpist!)

"If Music be the food of love, play on" - Shakespeare (Twelfth Night).

Well we're twanging the harp today to start week two of the Festival! So - here are a dozen facts about harps and harpists to muse over and discuss in the pub with all your mates:-

1. The harp is one of the world's oldest instruments. It dates back to around 3000 B.C. and was first depicted on the sides of ancient Egyptian tombs and in Mesopotamian culture (that's a good use for it.) Apparently, the largest variety of harps can be found in Africa. The harp has a place in the traditions of nearly 150 African peoples.
2. The verb "harp" means to talk on and on about one subject (so true! Have you ever met a group of female harpists? What is the collective noun for a group of female harpists I wonder? A twang? (suggestions please). Scholars think the word 'harp' is derived from Old German, Old Norse and Anglo Saxon words that mean 'to pluck' (I'm not saying anything).
3. Those that play the Irish harp use their fingernails to pluck the strings. (oooooh - that must be painful, I think they should stop, Now). They'll need to keep their nail clippers handy because fingernails on average grow about .02 inches per week. It doesn't seem like much but the more you use your hands, the faster your nails grow. (witches and female harpists have very long fingernails. Have you noticed that there are lots of other similarities as well?).
4. Harpists consider themselves to be very important (tell me about it) and that's possibly because it's considered an instrument for aristocrats, often played for Royalty. (still is).
5. The popular Irish beer, Guinness, features a harp as its symbol (ah! now you're talking - pint or what?).
6. You can always hear the harpists 'plinkety plonking' away before a concert because they have to tune all the strings.
7. They tune to 'A' = 440 which was affirmed as the international standard for pitch in 1955 by the International Organization for Standardization in Switzerland and reaffirmed in 1975. That's because the actual pitch of an 'A' has varied over the centuries. Scientists couldn't measure the amplitude and duration of sound waves until 150 or so years ago, so people relied on the craftsmen who made tuning forks and pitch pipes which varied greatly in accuracy. Now 'A' must produce sound waves measuring 440Hz. However, many musicians and orchestras are tempted to cheat, because a fractionally higher pitch makes for a brighter sound (some orchestras, like the New York Philharmonic, tune to 'A' = 443Hz -well they would, wouldn't they!).

8. Harpists must tune to 'A' = 440 and then all the strings must be relative to that pitch. (well good luck with that!). When the harp is tuned correctly (it did happen apparently - once), the pressure of the strings on the sounding board is approximately 4,400 pounds. (the pressure on the audience's ears, nerves and senses has yet to be measured)
9. In 1875, the general consensus of opinion was that the instrument was much too complicated for a woman to play! (absolutely!)
10. Having no "black keys", you may wonder - how does the harpist know where they are among the 47 strings? (the answer is - they don't) In fact every C string is coloured RED while every F string is BLACK. (that makes it easy peasy).
11. The average concert grand pedal harp weighs around 80 pounds and is approximately six feet in height. (which is why men, being the courteous, polite, caring creatures they are, are always seen humping the Harp on and off stages and into vans and cars - just watch)
12. In medieval Scandinavia the harp was viewed as an instrument for noblemen. A commoner found playing a harp was condemned to death (can we re-instate this law please?).

** Please note - comments are just made for fun. Nothing is meant to be critical or sexist or in any way demeaning to harp makers or harpists (male or female), or to harps (large or small).

Tomorrow I shall be mostly mumbling about Opera

Mumbling Maestro of Mumbles