

So only three concerts left – where have the days gone! This festival seems to have flown past!

This evening the Carducci Quartet will be at St Rhidian's and St Illtyd's Church, Llanrhidian. Parking will be at Mr and Mrs Dunn's field on the Reynoldston to Llanrhidian road and will be signposted. There will be a shuttle bus to the church and back, both before and after the concert. Tonight is a sell-out, but if you still need tickets there may be some returns on the door.

On Saturday we have our final concert which will be a special gala concert to celebrate the 75th birthday of our new Gower Festival president, Sir Karl Jenkins. This is another sell-out and we are expecting nearly 600 people in the audience, plus orchestra, choir and soloists! However we will not be expecting as many as are anticipated for the Stereophonics concert in Singleton Park and there we have a slight problem! Getting to St Mary's on Saturday shouldn't be a problem in that Mumbles Road and Gower Road through Sketty should still be open. However, De la Beche road will be one-way, Llewellyn Street and Lewis Street will be one way and Brynmill Lane will be closed. So there shouldn't be too many problems getting there, apart from extra traffic, but please allow extra time to get there.

Going home will be a different problem, Mumbles Road and Gower Road will both be closed from 10 - 11.45pm. Therefore, if you need to go to the west of the city or south Gower, you will need to go a different way home. I have been told that the Swansea City website has full details.

We have had a trickle of answers to the Maestro's Quiz so far. If you haven't sent in yours you might like to take another look at it.

So on to the quiz and the Maestro's Marvellous Mumbblings

"Classical music is the kind we keep thinking will turn into a tune" - K. Hubbard

The other day, I started to think back to the wonderful piano playing we've enjoyed so far in this year's Gower Festival and my mind wandered so - stop what you're doing for a moment and come wander with me. First of all - look at your hand. No really - just for a moment - look closely at your hand, right or left doesn't matter. Now read on.

The human hand, with its four fingers and thumb, is a miracle of design, function, dexterity and beauty. It contains 29 major and minor bones (though believe it or not - some people have a few more) and 29 major joints. Each human hand has at least 123 named ligaments and 34 muscles that move the fingers and thumb; 17 of these muscles are located in the palm of the hand and 18 of them in the forearm. Interestingly, there are no muscles in our fingers. The muscles that move our fingers are located in our palms and mid-forearms. These muscles are connected to our finger bones by tendons, which yank and pull and move our fingers in the same way that strings move a puppet.

Actual hand size is as variable as every other aspect of the human body. (we will not - for now - discuss the schoolboy theory that a man's thumb size is indicative of the size of another useful male organ). Let us examine a few sensible observations and facts about hand size.

There are some occupations for which large hands are a downright liability. Work like building circuits, cutting diamonds, defusing bombs etc. favour a small, still hand. (any more?). Then, there are activities for which big hands are an asset, such as rugby, goalkeeping, boxing (i.e. bashing people). (again - any others?)

There is a perception that a pre-requisite for being a string player or a decent pianist is big hands but that's not true. Daniel Barenboim, who stands 5'6" tall, can stretch but a ninth - that is, an octave plus one key. The composer and pianist Alexander Scriabin (see yesterday's mumbblings) stood but five feet tall and could stretch only an octave, yet he was considered to be a "great pianist". The brilliant Oscar Peterson had arthritis in both hands from a very young age and had trouble buttoning his shirt - yet he could play a note or two! The famous Spanish pianist Alicia de Larrocha stood under five feet tall and had the stubbiest of fingers. However, she had a wide palm and a long stretch between her thumbs and index finger, a stretch that allowed her to compensate for the length of her fingers. Chopin's hands were tiny for a bloke but very stretchy apparently - "Opening up like the jaws

of a snake" according to an eyewitness. He could probably stretch a comfortable nine but may have just managed a ten note span. Ashkenazy can only reach a ninth.

"Rachmaninoff would come on stage stiff and severe, never smiling, his hair cropped as close as a convict's. He played with the minimum of physical exertion. From his fingers came an indescribably warm tone that reached into every corner of the hall. Those marvellous fingers seemed incapable of striking a wrong note". In an age of spectacular technicians, apparently Rachmaninoff was peerless.

So when you see Gordon Back - the Gower Festival's Artistic Director (and a world famous pianist in his own right) at tonight's event (he'll be there, looking kempt and shevelled by the bar as usual, hoping someone will buy him a glass of wine) don't forget to look at his hands and ask him how many notes he can span (I'll put a quid on it being a 10th).

Tomorrow I shall be mostly mumbling about Saxophones.

Mumbling Maestro of Mumbles