

We come to the penultimate concert today at Clyne Chapel and welcome Oliver Wass and Huw Wiggin for the first time to the Gower Festival. I like the sound of the harp. I like the sound of the saxophone. I have never heard the two together, but I think it is going to be really exciting!

They will be playing music by J S Bach, Debussy, Gershwin, Chick Corea, Rimsky-Korsakov and Manuel de Falla which sounds wonderful. There may be one or two tickets available on the door if you don't have tickets but would now like to attend the concert.

Don't forget to get your entry in for the quiz which will close at the end of tomorrow. Also on Saturday don't forget to allow extra time to get to St Mary's as there will be a lot of traffic going to the Stereophonics concert.

Now, without further ado, over to the Mumbling Maestro

"Competitions are for horses, not artists" - Bela Bartok

In the summer of 1936, the songwriting team of George and Ira Gershwin (Ira was his brother - I know the old joke as well!) settled their affairs in New York and flew off to Hollywood to fulfil a contract with RKO Studios. The Gershwins were to supply songs for a series of new movies, some starring an old friend of theirs, the dancer Fred Astaire. In those days the big movie studios moved quickly and fortunately so did the Gershwins.

The first film in the contracted series, with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers as the romantic leads, was entitled *Shall We Dance* and was completed, scored and released in less than a year. In 1937, RKO Studios released their second Gershwin collaboration, *Damsel in Distress*. This starred Astaire and Joan Fontaine and included two songs that would become Gershwin classics: *A Foggy Day in London Town* and *Nice Work if You Can Get It*. The release of *Damsel in Distress* was a bittersweet event. Gershwin had died suddenly on July the 11th that year following surgery to remove a brain tumour. The musical world was shocked. *Damsel in Distress* proved to be the last major project he completed. Let's not leave this topic on a note of sadness. There's a nice story that Gershwin and Stravinsky were at a party and the young George enquired about lessons with the great man. Stravinsky asked him how much he earned. Upon hearing "A hundred thousand dollars a year-maybe two hundred thousand" Stravinsky responded "Well then, in that case perhaps it is I who ought to study under you!"

We'll enjoy some virtuoso saxophone playing this week in the Gower Festival. The saxophone was invented by Antoine-Joseph Sax who was born on the 6th of November 1814, in Dinant, Belgium. Whilst his given name was Antoine-Joseph, he was called Adolphe from childhood. Young Adolphe was so incredibly accident prone that it's a wonder he was around for long enough to invent anything. All these things happened to him:-

- 1) He fell from a third floor window and landed head first on the pavement,
- 2) At the age of three he drank a bowl full of acid - thinking it was milk!
- 3) He swallowed a pin - and no - not a safety pin - a hat pin!
- 4) He blew himself and his workshop up in a gunpowder explosion,
- 5) He fell onto a hot, cast-iron frying pan and suffered third degree burns,
- 6) He almost died of suffocation in his own unventilated bedroom when he kept newly varnished items there overnight.
- 7) He was hit on the head by a cobblestone that fell from a roof.
- 8) He fell into a river and, since he couldn't swim, he barely survived.

Apparently, his neighbours called him "Little Sax - The Ghost".

Adolphe Sax was a serial inventor - he came up with the saxotromba, the sax-horn and the sax-tuba and in 1840, he developed the instrument for which he is best known:- the saxophone and which he patented on the 28th of June 1846.

Sax's workshop sold some 20,000 saxophones in its first few years of business, but he was not a competent money manager. He filed for bankruptcy three times and he was saved from a fourth by the intervention of one of his admirers - none other than Emperor Napoleon III. Sax had five children by Spanish-born Louise-Adèle Maor, whom he never married. His son Adolphe-Edouard Sax, followed

him into the family saxophone making business, taking it into the twentieth century when it was bought out by the Selmer company and it thrives under their name to this day. He lived his final years being kept out of poverty by a small pension arranged for him by another admirer. By the time of his death on February 7, 1894, at the age of 80, Sax felt that his life's work had been in vain. The saxophone was used in band music but had little presence outside Belgium and France. If he only knew that his creation would be taken to America by military bandsmen returning from the Spanish-American war and would end up being played enthusiastically by millions worldwide, from schoolchildren to the President of the USA.

We're also going to have a spot of 'de Falla' this week; now what can we find out about him? Well, he was a very private guy. His first work of importance, the one-act opera *La Vida Breve* (The Brief Life), was performed in 1913 and was followed by *El Amor Brujo* (Love, the Magician), in 1915 and *El Sombrero de Tres Picos* (The Three-cornered Hat), in 1919. Manuel de Falla was 'light on his feet' (how unusual) and it was widely rumoured that he was romantically involved with French composer Maurice Ravel, whose magnificent Quartet we heard the other night. De Falla and Ravel's personal lives were both closely guarded and extremely private, both leaving behind no written trace of their liaisons. However their contemporaries and 'friends' were quick enough to find out what was going on and to spread the gossip (rotters, cads and bounders). The elegance, sensuality and erotic suggestiveness of de Falla's music are apparently interpreted by many as expressions of his character and are better than any written word. So, have a listen and think what you will.

Quick aside with which to finish; in the War (the First World War - you must have heard of it - it was in all the papers), Ravel was a dispatch rider and on one occasion he was captured by a German patrol. Luckily he escaped. Amongst the Germans who did the capturing was a young soldier called Adolf Hitler (I wonder what became of him?).

Tomorrow, my final mumblings of the Festival will be mostly about music and films

Mumbling Maestro of Mumbles