

28 September 2019

Dear Friend(s),

As I write this, we are experiencing some really autumnal weather: wet and windy, with the sound of a stormy high tide close by. A good reason, then, to recall warmer days and to send you news of our summer festival.

Arts festivals in general have been going through difficult times lately. Apart from fringe events, there will be no Swansea International Festival this October, and many smaller rural festivals are struggling to survive. So it is all the more of an achievement that this year's Gower Festival was such a success. Thanks to generous sponsorship and exceptionally good ticket sales, every Gower concert in 2019 made a surplus; and, in the case of the Children's Concert, proceeds of £400 were donated to 'Save the Children'. The music played and sung was wonderfully varied and the standard of performance was as high as ever - a tribute to the musicians and to the skill of our artistic director, Gordon Back. Our thanks go to you, as Friends of the Festival, for your loyal support and for continuing to spread the word. Special thanks also to those who helped at the events and who provided meals and accommodation for visiting artists.

No doubt we all have our favourite memories of this year's Festival. But what about next year? The 2020 Festival runs from Sunday 28 June to Saturday 11 July and from the draft programme which Gordon Back outlined to the committee last week it looks extremely enticing. 2020 is Beethoven year - the composer's 250th birthday - and his music features in several of our concerts. The Sitkovetsky Trio will devote an evening to Beethoven's piano trios; and some of his string quartets will be played by the excellent Elias Quartet, making their debut in Gower. (if you heard the Elias playing Beethoven on Radio 3 a few days ago, you'll know what a fine group they are)

In the opening week of the Festival we will welcome back pupils of the Menuhin School for two concerts. In the first (at All Saints Oystermouth) they will perform as a string orchestra, while in the second (in one of Gower's smaller churches) they will play solo instrumental and chamber music. Two days later quite a different kind of ensemble, the versatile Elysium Brass Quintet, will perform at Capel y Crwys in Three Crosses, a building with a spacious acoustic ideally suited to their music-making.

One of the highlights of the Festival is likely to be the song recital by Neal Davies, the admired Welsh bass-baritone and former winner of the Cardiff Singer of the World Lieder Prize. He will be accompanied by the pianist Sholto Kynoch, director of the Oxford Lieder Festival. There will be solo instrumental recitals too. A favourite with local audiences, the pianist Pavel Kolesnikov, will make a welcome return to Gower as will the guitarist Andrey Lebedev whose artistry so delighted us last year. Making his debut at the Festival, the pianist Martin James Bartlett, recent winner of the BBC Young Musician of the Year award, will play a fascinating programme of music associated with themes of love and death.

Alongside the classical repertoire which forms the backbone of the Festival, it is hoped to arrange a jazz and poetry event next year. Also planned is a guided coach tour of South Gower churches, focussing on their art and architecture and ending with tea at Port Eynon. The final concert of the Festival will be a tribute to Brian Clarke, an evening of some of the instrumental and choral music which he particularly enjoyed. Brian was a valued member of the Gower Festival committee and his untimely death in August came as a shock to his many friends. The concert will be an opportunity to remember his fine qualities as a musician, scientist and colleague.

There is enough here, I hope, to whet your appetite for what we can look forward to next summer. As usual, the Festival leaflet, with dates, times and information about events and performers, will be circulated around March, and slightly fuller information will be made available on the Gower Festival website: <https://www.gowerfestival.org>. You will also find some photos of this year's Festival on the website.

Finally, a word about our 100 Club which raises extra money for the Festival each year. Last year we raised over £600 which really helps in funding the concerts we put on. There are currently places available in the club. It is open to anyone who is a Friend of the Gower Festival and is run on an annual basis from 1st April. The cost is £12 per share per year, and you may have as many shares as you wish. Half the money raised goes to the Festival, while the other half is distributed as prizes three times per year - in July, November and March. The first prize in each draw is £100, the second prize £50 and there are two prizes of £25 in the July and November draws. In the March draw the number of £25 prizes is adjusted to ensure that half the money raised is given as prizes within the year.

As one draw for the 100 Club has already taken place this year, the subscription will be only £8 until March, and £12 per annum thereafter. If you are interested in joining, please contact Anne Pope, 10 Vowley View, Royal Wootton Bassett, Wilts SN4 8HT or email her at friends@gowerfestival.org and she will be pleased to send you an application form.

With best wishes on behalf of everyone on the Gower Festival Committee,

Hugh Dunthorne
friends@gowerfestival.org