

Dear All

At the time when the Gower Festival would have just started, our chairman, Bill Anderson, wanted to write to you all to update you on the situation with the Gower Festival. His letter is below. The Mumbling Maestro has also put pen to paper (well finger to keyboard) to write an amusing little mumble which you will find after the Chairman's letter.

Best wishes,
Anne



28th June 2020

Dear Friends

Under normal circumstances, around now we should be looking forward to two weeks of Gower Festival, 'music for summer evenings' in Gower churches. As we all know, it was not to be and we are all very disappointed. Gordon had arranged some really lovely concerts and other evenings.

However, I would like to assure you that we are determined to hold Gower Festival 2021 in some way.

We have several schemes for coping with the current guidance on social distancing and limited travel but we must all hope that the current rules will *not* apply in a year's time. They are being relaxed right now and we all hope fervently that this will allow even more relaxation as time passes. However, there is the possibility that there will be a resurgence in the winter since cold weather allows the virus to live longer. This could be suppressed by some sort of vaccination programme but be assured that contingency plans are well underway and we are confident we can produce another outstanding season.

Our planning for Gower Festival 2021, to take place on the announced dates of July 5th to 17th, is as complete as it can be at this stage.

Artistic Director, Gordon Back, writes "I am thrilled to announce that *all* the exciting artists from this year's festival are re engaged for next year except for the Menuhin School, who are unfortunately not available. Thank you for your loyal support during this difficult time. We can assure you that the Gower Festival, 2021 will be an event well worth waiting for!"

Finally, on a practical matter, we had to cancel our AGM and are going to arrange for a postal/email equivalent. We have been held up because our Auditors have been on furlough but we hope to get the accounts soon. Please look out for AGM papers in about three weeks' time.

Best wishes to you all.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'WJ Anderson'.

Bill Anderson
Chairman/Cadeirydd

So - here we are!! A Gower Festival-less year. Not the best situation but a necessary one.

I like to do a bit of mumbling at this time of year and so - if you don't mind - I will. For a first mumble, what better topic to choose than the genius that was Beethoven. Now, I'm sure you're all very familiar with the sad stories of his deafness and loneliness so I'm not going to dwell on any of that - on the contrary, I'd would rather (if possible) make you smile with a few more off-beat tales and goodness knows, we all need to smile and laugh a bit more right now. I'm inviting some audience participation here. To the opening "motif" of Beethoven's fifth symphony - (you know the bit - "dah dah dah daaaah") - you can sing the bits in red and then you too can feel you've been involved in helping to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the great man's birth. (**Ah yes we can**) Got the idea? Good!!

There are plenty of myths and legends about Beethoven doing the rounds - especially this year. There are some pretty strange and whacky stories and many of the truths and facts are lost in the mists of time. I thought I'd tell you one or two of the things I've found and you can decide whether you believe them or not (**That's a good plan**). Yes, I thought so. Let us begin.

Apparently, the prefix van before Beethoven, hints at the family's Flemish heritage, while the surname - Beethoven- suggests that the family was involved with beetroot farming at some point. (**I like Beet-root**) good - so do I. There are tales of Beethoven being nicknamed "Spaniard" or "Moor" because of his dark complexion and some portraits show him with very dark skin. One article claims that Beethoven was actually a black man.

(**What was he like?**) Well, nobody really knows for certain because there aren't any photographs and the portrait painters of the time didn't always go for accuracy of detail. There are accounts of his appearance written by people who knew him. Here's one written by someone who claimed he was his friend (some friend, this isn't very complimentary) "He was very strongly and broadly built. His head was unusually large and he had thick black hair. His forehead was broad with bushy eyebrows and deep-set eyes. He was short sighted and wore glasses. He had a broad nose and a swarthy complexion and he often went for days without shaving. His cheeks were marked by small pox, the mouth broad with a protruding lower lip and the chin unequally divided by a deep cleft. His hands were broad and red and his fingers short. He had a raucous laugh and was inclined to spit a lot.

(**No oil painting then?**). No - not really and as I say the oil paintings weren't a particularly good likeness anyway!! Apparently he had good teeth. He was 5'5" so

he could never have joined the Police. It seems he was about average height for a composer though. Mozart was 5'4", Schubert 5'2", Wagner 5'4" and Stravinsky 5'3".

(**Did he have friends?**) Well, yes. He wasn't the easiest guy to be friends with mind and so he attracted a strange collection of chums. My favourite is definitely a guy called Johann Nepomuk Maelzel. He was an inventor - of sorts. He invented a mechanical bugler that played out of tune, an ear trumpet that didn't work, an instrument called a Panharmonicon that was something like a massive music box run by air pressure - and he invented the metronome but that was by accident. My favourite is his automatic chess playing machine - which kept losing. It was a clever idea - there was a bloke hidden inside shifting the chess pieces. The trouble was he was an awful chess player and so the machine never won. Maelzel and Beethoven had a stormy relationship!

Beethoven liked to have a set daily routine. He rose at dawn and wasted little time before getting down to work. His breakfast was coffee, which he prepared himself with great care. He determined that there should be exactly sixty beans per cup and he often counted them out one by one for a precise dose. (**Sixty beans per cup?!**) Yes - not one more not one less. Now, would you believe that a guy in America has made coffee using exactly sixty 60 beans to find out what it's like (**That's one sad bloke**) I know - some people really need to get out more! The result was ----- depending on exactly how Beethoven made the coffee -if it was an espresso it would be pretty strong and if a cafetiere it would be watery and quite weak. So now you know.

Beethoven studiously worked at his desk until 2:00 or 3:00pm, then he'd have lunch before taking a long and vigorous walk, which would occupy the rest of the afternoon. He always carried a pencil and a couple of sheets of manuscript paper in his pocket to record chance musical thoughts. As the day wound down, he often stopped at a tavern to read the newspapers. Evenings were usually spent with company or at the theatre, although in winter he preferred to stay home and read. Supper was usually a simple affair - a bowl of soup and some leftovers from lunch. Beethoven enjoyed wine with his food and he liked to have a glass of beer and smoke his pipe after supper. He rarely worked on his music in the evening and usually went to bed at about 10:00pm.

There's a famous quote - "There are and will be a thousand princes; there is only one Ludwig van Beethoven". (**Who said that then?**) Well, he did actually - he wasn't a modest guy and what's more - it wasn't true because there were three.

The first Ludwig van Beethoven was the composer's grandfather and the second was Beethoven's older brother, who passed away a few days after his birth.

I wonder if Beethoven would have liked Gower???. The chances are he wouldn't have been that fussed. (**That can't be true**). Ah yes, I think so - because apparently, he didn't like the sea. It's believed that he visited the Dutch coast at Scheveningen in 1783 but he was not keen on what he saw. Although he received repeated invitations to come to Britain, he never contemplated setting foot on a sea-going ship. (**That's a great shame**) Yes it is, because both Mozart and Haydn before him had shown no such fear and Mendelssohn was particularly well travelled. Beethoven however, raised beside the Rhine, had no appetite to engage with any broader body of water.

So we've had a bit of fun - but we still realise and recognise Beethoven as the wonderful musical genius that he was and we're grateful for all the pleasure his compositions have brought us. He passed away during a thunderstorm on March 26, 1827 after a long illness. We don't really know his final words, although his friends and biographers have recorded many different versions including "Pity, pity - too late," or "Applaud, my friends, the comedy is over" and "I shall hear in heaven", a reference to his deafness.

(**More mumbblings soon?**) Yes - watch this space.

Mumbling Maestro of Mumbles