



2024

Special Report

Junior Section 2 November

The number of entrants in both the children and adult section of this year's festival were lower than usual but the quality of the performances and feedback from adjudicator Gary Ryan made up for the lull in numbers. It was definitely a case of quality over quantity. The calm ambience in the hall was certainly conducive to overcoming performance nerves and the proceedings became more akin to a masterclass at West Dean than a competition. The age of the children who entered the fifteen classes ranged from under 9's to under 18's, the common denominator being that the children just do not seem to suffer from performance nerves to the same degree as adults do! Gary advised all participants that it was important to introduce yourself and the piece to be played. Gary was entertained by Robbie Cartwright's mention of who he was before each of his four pieces and by Seren Mathias informing the audience that she was still Seren Mathias before each of hers.

Gary started by saying that there are two stages to learning a piece; learning how to play it and then learning how to perform it in public. No one has left the stage without murmuring internally 'It was great when I played it yesterday in my bedroom'. However, he consoled the children and any adults who happened to be in the audience, that you learn more from one performance than you do from ten lessons and never

judge how well you can play a piece by one performance only. Gary stressed the importance of taking time to compose oneself on stage and to view this like the prelude to launching a ship. Face the audience square on, adopt the correct position with the music stand just to the left, gently position the fingers of both hands on the correct strings, tilt the guitar slightly towards you so that you can



just see the strings and think of the mood that you wish to convey and the desired tempo.

Gary stated that there are three main performance requirements; good projection, good pulse and accuracy of notes, tempo and dynamics. Not much really! He encouraged us all to make a bigger sound. The guitar is an instrument of small changes; lifting up the right hand wrist by imagining that you are holding a tangerine helps to produce a fuller sound. But take care not to be over zealous and pull the string too hard as this produces an ugly Bartok pizzicato effect. He encouraged us all to be an extrovert Brazilian rather than an apologetic Englishman when we played. Of course a good set of nails is essential and apparently sesame seeds contains a vital ingredient that will help to achieve this.



Gary reassured us that mistakes are a normal part of performing, and are never as bad as you think. The audience always forgets them which is the opposite to the performer's

tendency to remember the exact note and bar in which the error occurred. Unfortunately some notes are more 'wrong' than others and will be more noticeable. Maintaining a steady pulse is essential although the surge of adrenaline, either through terror or enthusiasm, assisted by not breathing, adds an extra 10% to the tempo. If you speed up too much then pieces become technically harder to play and more difficult to remember. His words of advice were often demonstrated on the stage with Gary playing the right hand and the performer playing the left.



As always, a wealth of musical knowledge and experience was imparted to all the children but the most memorable fact was 'The Seven Divisions of the Beat', which could almost equate to 'The Seven Wonders of the World!' When a note is divided into notes of a smaller time value it is often difficult to play them evenly. However, if paired with a word where the number of syllables matches the number of divisions of the beat an evenness can be achieved. Gary used species from the animal kingdom to demonstrate, such that ant is one beat, tiger two, elephant three, armadillo four, hippopotamus five, biodiversity six, lesser-spotted-woodpecker seven. Now how many music teachers can come up with such an imaginative formula!



Participants and audience spent an enjoyable day listening to some excellent guitar performances and words of advice and the day drew to an end just before the sun set. The hall was tidied away, cups washed up and everything set out for the adult section the following day.

Senior Section 3 November

The adult section of the festival began at 1pm this year giving us all time to have a lie in or, as was more likely to be the case, to frantically practise our repertoire. Guitar Harmony, directed by Andrew Richardson, were first to grace the stage. Having recently given a very successful concert with the Rustington Community Choir and Sussex West Guides Choir, they were ready to give a repeat performance to Gary Ryan (this year's adjudicator). Jay Huff joined the troupe causing a sharp intake of breath from the WSGO members who were concerned that he had defected. He and Sue Allen were asked by Sasha what colour lighting they requested and fortunately both agreed on blue. Their programme had something for everyone. We heard 'Sailing' by Gavin Sutherland, made famous by Rod Stewart, and



the beautifully melodic 'Carillon' by the Australian/British band Sky, whose members included John Williams and Herbie Flowers. There followed the aria 'Eliza' from the ballet 'Wild Swans' also commonly known as the signature tune for the Lloyds/TSB advert campaign and the energetic 'La Bamba'.

All of their programme had been specially arranged for the group by Andrew. Gary mentioned the importance of maintaining good eye contact with the leader and each other and congratulated them on their commendable artistic flair and control. The trophy was gratefully received by Judith Ratledge.

WSGO, directed and conducted by Linda Kelsall-Barnett, performed 'Rondeau' from Purcell's 'The Fairy Queen' and 'Farewell to Stromness' by Peter Maxwell Davies. Jay Huff forgot the foot pedal essential for turning the pages of 'Farewell to Stromness' on his I-pad but his musical memory and improvisation skills saved the day. Reunited with his foot pedal, they continued with 'Morenita' and ended with the exotic 'In a Persian Market'. This was composed originally for orchestra by Albert Ketèlbey and when first published as a piano version it was advertised as an 'educational novelty'. For Debbie Burford, who arranged the piece for the Gala Quartet in 2001, it was a labour of love that took 35 hours to work through 11 pages of piano score, all at a friend's house on a borrowed computer. This vibrant and atmospheric piece was first performed by the quartet to Charles Ramirez in the 2001 festival. WSGO were delighted to resurrect the sounds of Caliphs, snake charmers, beggars, jugglers and beautiful princesses.

The solo section, although low in entrants, was special in many ways and Sasha infused us all with the adage that 'less is more'. Harri Goldsmith, after a hiatus of three years returned to the festival stage and the resounding applause following her performance of Pachelbel's Canon hopefully means that she will return next year. Debbie Burford joined Teresa Henley in the intermediate class II after an even longer hiatus from performing solo. Debbie informed us that she performs solo every twenty years and generally at the Chichester Music Festivals, the first being in 1993 to Norman Vaux and then again in 2013 to Vincent Lindsey-Clark. Debbie confessed, 'I was going to wait until 2033 but thought I might be pushing

my luck!' before adding 'I think I enjoyed playing this time the most - perhaps I am past caring now'. She played 'Austin's Allegro' along with 'The Old Watermill' by Gary Ryan and received resounding applause.



Chris Jones performed his own composition 'Cycling down Hawkhill', one of his favourite childhood pastimes when living in Alnwick, Northumberland and Teresa Henley played two consecutive pieces ('Prelude' by Molino and 'Rio by Night' by Vincent Lindsey-Clark) from memory and without experiencing the proverbial car crash. Peter Russell astounded us all by playing from memory, almost more pieces than all the other entrants put together, the most memorable being the catchy Bossa Nova 'One Note Samba' by Antonio Carlos Jobim. Gary demonstrated on the piano how the repeated opening note will sound different when accompanied by a descending bass line of changing chords and also proving his skills as a pianist!



Junior Alex Starchenka, unable to fly back in time to participate in the children's section, joined the adult class and played 'Country Etude' by Tatiana Stachak and 'Memories of Summer' by Gary Ryan. Evelina Kisliak rose through the ranks to join the adults and captured the wildness and passion of the guitar by performing her grade 7 pieces 'Tarantella' by Napoleon Coste and 'Bolero' by Julian Arcas. Linda Kelsall-Barnett mesmerised us with the demanding and energising 'Fantasia' by Legnani. The festival was brought to a close by the New Gala Quartet performing the Adagio from 'Spartacus' by Khachaturian, otherwise known as the theme tune to 'The Onedin Line' and 'Three Into Five' by Brian Bonsor.

Although low in entrants, this year's festival brought forth some excellent guitar playing and memorable moments in both the children and the adult section. We as a club are honoured that our patron Gary Ryan still manages to find the time to perform and adjudicate at our festivals despite holding the demanding post of Head of Strings at the Royal College of Music. His pearls of wisdom delivered with a generous slice of good humour retain their freshness and sincerity year after year and we are grateful that he continues to pay Bognor Regis a visit from time to time. An enormous amount of work is required to run the festival, whatever the number of entrants, and gratitude goes to all who helped behind the scenes, to photographer Chris Small, to Nina for providing refreshments, to Teresa and Debbie for helping on the door and with the adjudicator, and most of all to Sasha for his seemingly limitless energy and enthusiasm. Unlike the camera which ran out of charge at the end of Saturday morning, he just seems to be powered by his own unique brand of duracell batteries!

