

THE 10-MINUTE INTERVIEW

How Piers Lane is keeping up wartime appearances

THE AUSTRALIAN PIERS LANE IS one of today's foremost pianists. On 3 July, he and *Keeping Up Appearances* actress Patricia Routledge will perform 'Admission: One Shilling' at the Cheltenham Festival, the remarkable tale of Dame Myra Hess's wartime lunchtime concerts at the National Gallery, told through words and music.

Can you give us a brief idea of what 'Admission: One Shilling' is all about?

For the last four years I've directed a day at the National Gallery in memory of Dame Myra's wartime concerts held between April 1939 and October 1945. Last year, I invited Patricia Routledge to collaborate on this show with me. The script, by Nigel Hess, Dame Myra's great-nephew, is based on the words and writings of Dame Myra, Howard Ferguson who was her partner in crime during the concerts, and Kenneth Clark, the then

director of the Gallery. And I intersperse it with piano solos for which Myra was famous, ranging from Bach and Scarlatti through to Brahms and Schumann.

Why did you choose Patricia Routledge for the project?

She's amazing because she can evoke serious feelings and tears while lightening the mood every so often. At the very first Myra Hess lunchtime concert a friend said he looked up and thought he saw Dame Myra herself in the audience and did a double take.

Have you met audience members from the original wartime series?

We certainly have people at the National Gallery each year who remember being taken to the concerts as children; there was one lady who even sang in them. This year's Myra Hess day on 5 October features a lunchtime concert



MYRA ADMIRER:
Piers Lane pays tribute to Dame Myra Hess

by violinist Ida Haendel who must be the only artist still performing who played in the original concerts.

The wartime concerts must have been risky to stage?

I've heard accounts of people picking their way through the glass and stone, brought down by bombs during the night, to attend the concerts. Dame Myra thought that 30 of her friends might turn up for the first concert in 1939, and in fact 1,000 people lined up round Trafalgar Square.

what's coming up on CD and DVD

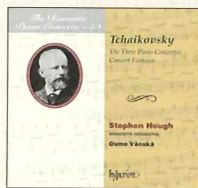
International Piano Master Competition, held in Tel Aviv in 1974. The master himself became her mentor, and hailed Canadian-born Janina Fialkowska as 'a born Chopin interpreter'. However in 2002 she was diagnosed with a



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BESTSELLERS CHART

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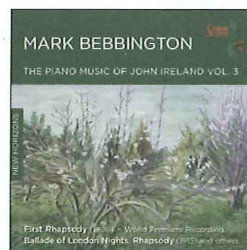
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10 JS Bach St Mark
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cancerous tumour in her left shoulder and her career ground to a halt, until some skilled surgery enabled her return to the platform in 2004. Since then she has been rebuilding her career, and has now released two Chopin albums in time for the composer's 200th anniversary, on the Canadian label Atma, to be reviewed next issue.



IRELAND FIRST

And one more first, this time in the form of a premiere by pianist Mark Bebbington, who has gained a reputation as a champion of

John Ireland on the record label Somm. The solo piano Rhapsody of 1906 is possibly the earliest surviving work of the British composer, who suppressed most of his earliest pre-World War I works; it is said to show the strong influence of Liszt and Rachmaninov, and clearly predates Ireland's attraction to the music of Debussy, Ravel and early Stravinsky.