

# Talking heads

## CONCERT PIANIST WARREN MAILLEY-SMITH talks to NIK SHELTON

Warren Mailley-Smith will perform Chopin's *Piano Concerto No 1* at West Road Concert Hall on Thursday, May 22, accompanied by the Cambridge Graduate Orchestra. The concert starts at 8pm and tickets are £12.5/£15. To book, call 01223 357651.

**At 32 you're still young for a solo concert pianist, did you start playing as a small child?**  
Apparently, so I'm told, I used to pick out notes and tunes on a piano as a child rather than bashing at the keys like a lot of children do. I started learning with the Queen's College organ scholar Stephen Armstrong aged four. Then I went to the Royal College of Music Junior Saturday school every weekend where I had this amazing musical environment and then for the rest of the week I had a normal life and went to a normal comprehensive school.

**I started playing my first public performances when I was 14 and I performed my first concerto aged 15 so I suppose I was about a year too late to be called a prodigy.**

**You have recently performed concerts on board the QE2 and the Queen Mary 2. Presumably you don't suffer from sea sickness?**

No, thankfully. It's wonderful because you really get to dress up for the occasion, especially on those two ships. And also you get to know your audience and you often get to talk to them afterwards. Well they can't

go anywhere – I suppose you would get worried if they all started throwing themselves overboard. But it is a little odd when the sea is really stormy and you have to chase the piano around the stage.

**You also got invited to perform at Carnegie Hall in New York in April, that must have been a nerve-wracking experience. It was like a dream come true for me.**  
It's very much like a wedding, you spend four months planning the thing and then it creeps up on you and before

you know it it's over. Before you go on you have all these pictures of famous piano players from the past staring down at you. But I was doing pieces I had done several times before so thankfully I wasn't too worried about the music itself.

**How often do you have to practice to be as good as you are?**  
I tend to practise whenever I can get the chance. Most days I'll do around four or five hours but sometimes it can be as much as 12 hours. You need to put your fingers in ice after something like that though.

**I once had to learn Rachmaninov's *Piano Concerto No 3* in three months for a performance. Normally I would give myself about eight months for something as complicated as that.**



I play on an upright piano usually and I don't think anyone would want to see that. But at Carnegie they usually have about three Steinway grand pianos and choosing between them is a little like picking one of three Ferraris, they are all amazing instruments.

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Johnson pales in comparison," he says, questioning the received wisdom about Eric Clapton's muse.