Report of Llandrindod Wells & District U3A March 2017 Meeting

Annual General Meeting
Lecture Meeting: George Gershwyn

Report by Clive Barrrett

The Chairman Berwyn Woolnough welcomed everyone to the A.G.M, and monthly meeting. In his Chairman's report he stated that it had been a very good year, there were now 264 members and 23 interest groups. During the year the group celebrated their 10th anniversary, there had been very varied speakers, a team won the area quiz, and had community links with local schools. He thanked everyone who had helped the group during the year, particularly Secretary Karen Latham, Treasurer Mary Russell, Programme Secretary Helen Wyton, and Committee member Ann Harvey who are all stepping down this year, with the Chairman making presentations to them in appreciation of their services.

Mary Russell's Treasurer report showed that the group has a healthy balance in hand.

The election of officers and committee followed: Chairman Berwyn Woolnough, Vice Chair Penny Everett, Treasurer Alan Thomas, assisted by his wife Chris, Committee Secretary Sue Parsons, Programme Secretary Sue Turner Membership Secretary Helena Cuddy. Added to present committee Delphine Carter, Auditor Martin Nosworthy.

News was announced of possible new interest groups namely, Badminton, Railways, Charabanc, with the latter a possible trip to Chester and its races in May.

The speaker for the morning was in fact the Chairman Berwyn Woolnough, whose topic was, "The Life and Music of George Gershwin". Berwyn spoke about the music the subject composed for shows, and his more serious works, saying "Porkie and Bess" was one of his best known. He said George was gregarious and liked to be the centre of attention, with many affairs, a long term relationship, but no marriage. His Jewish parents emigrated from Russia to America, as a youngster George loved sport, was a bit of a rebel, taught himself to play the piano, had lessons and his tutor thought he was "a genius", and he therefore received a thorough grounding in music. When he was fifteen George got into the music industry, by way of the publishing houses as a demonstration pianist. He played in bars, night clubs, wrote songs, accompanied himself on flute, with the music on one of his first penned songs. Al Jolson was in the audience, they got on well, and the result was "Swanee" when the musical "Sinbad" came into being. Between 1920 and 1924, he wrote music for a series of reviews, whilst his brother under the name of Arthur Francis wrote the lyrics.

The musical "Scandals" (1922) contained the song"Stairway to Paradise". His writings continued with piano & orchestra and piano concertos. " Rhapsody in Blue"---- the idea of sticking notes at the start. This established George as a classical musician with "Lady be Good" following. By this time his brother had taken on his more proper name of Ira Gershwin, and wrote the words. Several times during his fascinating talk, with background music Berwyn accompanied himself

on the clarinet to illustrate his talk including "Fascinating Rhythm". At this time he met singer Gertrude Lawrence in London, and he invited her over to New York, her famous number was "Someone to Watch over Me". George was involved in 18 musicals and four films. Included in the above was the stage show "Girl Crazy" with a young Ginger Rogers in the show. The show's numbers included "I Got Rhythm" and "Embraceable You'. In 1924 the book "Porgie" was written, the author was eventually persuaded to let it become a play, so George composed the music for the show "Porgie and Bess" in 1935. Berwyn commented that some of his later songs such as " I Got Plenty of Nothin", and in his opinion "Summertime" were George's best tunes, and the speaker maintained that his music lives on, examples his last numbers " Shall We Dance" (Musical) and " Can't Take That Away from Me".

By the Spring of 1936, George was experiencing blinding headaches, and losing his way when he played the piano. In July 1937, a brain tumour was diagnosed, but unfortunately he died during the resulting operation. His funeral was said to be the biggest of any musician. The speaker then answered a number of varied questions about George Gershwin and his life.

Vice Chair Penny Everett thanked Berwyn for Chairing the A.G.M and entertaining members so well, with his most interesting musical lecture. The speaker for the meeting on Monday 10th April will be Jill Lloyd, whose intriguing entitled lecture is entitled" Look after your feet, and your feet will look after you".