



Mark Eager

Trombonist, endurance athlete, conductor and artistic director – is there anything this man can't do?

Q. Where do you call home?

A. Difficult one! Until just before Christmas I lived in Llysworney (near Cowbridge) and Bath pretty equally. I have been working in Australia and Malaysia for the last three months and in January I am moving to Salisbury but have places in Burnham (near one son's school) and London (where another son is studying medicine). Cardiff is very much an 'emotional home' as it is where much of my artistic work takes place.

Q. How well do you know Cardiff?

A. I moved to Cardiff in 1993 working at the BBC in Llandaff until 2006. My boys were choristers at Llandaff Cathedral and my wife taught at Howells. We got to know and love the area very well.

Q. Describe a typical day in your diary.

A. This doesn't exist! It could be: a rehearsal or

concert day with The Welsh Sinfonia of which I am conductor and artistic director, a day relaxing in a beautiful resort hotel in Malaysia with an evening string orchestra rehearsal, a day in Cardiff conducting students at the university and the Royal Welsh College of Music, or a day of examining for Trinity College London either in the UK or abroad somewhere, or a day at home studying scores.

Q. Cardiff Bay or city centre?

A. Cardiff Bay has changed so much since I came to Cardiff and I now enjoy a walk and a coffee there. For many years I owned a flat overlooking the park between Pontcanna and Llandaff, often running the Taff Trail – another wonderful area. The castle and university areas are favourites too.

Q. What's been your greatest achievement to date?

A. Breaking the four-minute mile was an amazing achievement and has perhaps led to my competitive nature. I have twice represented the GB team in the long-distance triathlon. The BBC also commissioned two trombone concertos for me (from Alun Hoddinott and John Pickard) and I played the world premières with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales on BBC Radio 3. Contextually this was quite an achievement as the trombone is rarely seen as a solo instrument.

Q. Do you prefer to play or conduct?

A. As principal conductor of The Welsh Sinfonia, an ensemble that is about to set chamber music in Wales afloat, I enjoy the cerebral side of conducting – from the studying of scores and choosing programmes to invigorating and energising my musicians. As conductor of Cardiff University Symphony Orchestra it is a privilege to develop and nurture fine young musicians. I thoroughly enjoyed many years of playing at the very highest level but have moved on.

Q. Tell us about your most memorable performance.

A. My memory is full of different performances. Twenty years of Royal Albert Hall BBC Proms

concerts – the trombone solo in Sibelius 7, *The Planets*, Saint-Saens' Organ Symphony and many more. Conducting the large forces in Janacek's Sinfonietta at St David's Hall, Cardiff. I will never forget the poignant moment of playing *Fanfare for the Common Man* in Estonia in 1992 to 40,000 liberated people, all brandishing torches in the dim glow of twilight.

Q. How do you find the time to do all of your triathlons and marathons for charity?

A. Running is easy so wherever I am, off I go. The cycling and swimming have taken a back seat recently owing to my travels but I would like to tackle L'Étape (amateur stage of the Tour de France) in a couple of years.

Q. What's on your iPod?

A. Mostly a wide range of classical, from Handel to Schoenberg. I have some Elton John, Peter Gabriel and Rick Wakeman from my youth.

Q. How do you relax?

A. Holidays with my family – we trekked the Annapurna mountain range in Nepal at Christmas and have a villa in Italy in the summer. At home I like comedy, so *Mock the Week*, *Have I Got News For You* or *Q!* all help me wind down.

Q. Favourite quote?

A. A serious one: "Never look down on anybody unless you're helping them up" – Jesse Jackson
A fun one: "The English may not like music, but they absolutely love the noise it makes" – Sir Thomas Beecham.

Q. Share a favourite spot in the city, which you won't find in the guidebooks.

A. The narrow, leafy lanes towards the Vale of Glamorgan.

Q. Is there anything else you want to achieve?

A. I want to develop The Welsh Sinfonia into a world-renowned chamber orchestra. A dream is to facilitate world peace through music.

Q. Surprise us.

A. I am teetotal and in fact have never drunk alcohol in my whole life, stemming from a Salvation Army background. *SE*



Mark considers trekking a mountain range "relaxing"; As well as being a successful conductor, Mark is an acclaimed trombonist; Llandaff Cathedral, where Mark's sons were choristers

