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REVIEW CLASSICAL

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## Miracle in a major key

**T**HE IRREPRESSIBLE Jack Gibbons was back at the Queen Elizabeth Hall last Sunday, after a long absence but still with his marvellous Gershwin show. He played not only Gershwin, but also composers the master admired, including Bach; he also played music by Gershwin's admirers, including Ravel and Rachmaninov. With a big, muscular sound, hurling fistfuls of notes in every direction, Gibbons was on top form.

After the interval he deconstructed a dazzling piece of stride, remarking as he did so that last year he'd broken his left arm in 15 places. Then he dazzled some more and wound up playing a deliciously comic piece of Gershwin Mozart. We cheered him to the rafters.

### Michael Church applauds a gutsy Jack Gibbons

Offstage, this debonair young man admitted that his return had been a long haul. One morning last year, Gibbons was in a crash which reduced his car to half its length. But the collapsed lung, abdominal and facial injuries and broken feet were nothing compared with the damage to his left arm. His surgeon was within a millimetre of severing the main nerve to the hand, which would have ended his career.

His life hung in the balance and for a while he couldn't speak but he did write to his surgeon promising a concert, which he duly gave from a wheelchair



**TALENT:** A crash nearly ended Gibbons's career

on his 40th birthday, to raise funds for the Radcliffe Hospital's critical care unit.

Convalescing, he composed classical songs – songs about loss and regret to be performed in America later this year. He had a relapse and a large part of his intestines was removed.

The X-rays of his face and arm now show an intricate tracery of rods, plates and pins and the reconstruction of his muscular abilities has been slow. At first, he found it impossible to tell his fingers what to do because the link between brain and hands had been disrupted. His hearing had also been impaired. "Oddly,"

he says, "that worried me more than my other injuries."

He returned to the stage in a wheelchair, from which he played his own arrangements of Bach and Chopin for his right hand. And, finally, last November he made his return to New York's Carnegie Hall to huge cheers.

How has the experience changed his attitude to music? "I value it much more." He is no longer concerned about what the critics say or about the future. "I've realised anything can happen. I've also become a fan of the NHS."

Going by last Sunday, it must have done him good to realise how many fans he has, too. The night would have been gruelling for anyone, but for a man who has been so mangled, it was miraculous.