

A HISTORY OF WELSH MUSIC

From early medieval bards to the bands of the ‘Cool Cymru’ era, this book looks at Welsh musical practices and traditions, the forces that have influenced and directed them and the ways in which the idea of Wales as a ‘musical nation’ has been formed and embedded in popular consciousness in Wales and beyond. Beginning with early medieval descriptions of musical life in Wales, the book provides both an overarching study of Welsh music history and detailed consideration of the ideas, beliefs, practices and institutions that shaped it. Topics include the eisteddfod, the church and the chapel, the influence of the Welsh language and Welsh cultural traditions, the scholarship of the Celtic revival and the folk-song movement, the impacts of industrialisation and digitisation, and exposure to broader trends in popular culture, including commercial popular music and sport.

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A HISTORY OF WELSH MUSIC

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Preface

Scope and Structure

This is the first book to be devoted to the history of Welsh music. Others have been written on specific and more restricted topics and are properly regarded as seminal texts, but none have previously been devoted to the entire span of Welsh music or place it in the wider history of the country. We have settled on an approach which is both thematic and chronological. Following a mapping chapter, some chapters focus on topics that cover most of the period to which the book is devoted (such as the chapter on *eisteddfodau*), while most others, such as that on the Celtic revival, deal with a topic within a specific period. The earliest known sources for the history of Welsh music are found in poetry and other early narratives that describe how people of different stations in Welsh life engaged with music and the purposes it served for them. Most chapters address both this idea and the repertoires and practices that occurred in the various phases of Welsh music history. Instrumental and vocal music and the secular, sacred, popular and more elevated forms have similar prominence in the book, but all contributors have written of the context in which music was made and in which it was heard. It is inevitable that matters relevant to any one chapter have equal, or near-equal, relevance to another, because some themes are recurrent. We have envisaged the book as a collection of overlapping chapters rather than a single linear account, so we have taken care to ensure that the integrity of each one is protected even if some topics appear in more than one place.

We have been especially mindful of how we can best deliver the story of Welsh music to a global readership. The ideas, events and movements that unfolded in this history achieve full meaning only when understood in the context of a wider set of features and sources than can properly be examined in a single volume. The challenge is that very little is understood about Welsh music outside Wales, except among those who have had a specific reason for finding out about it. Furthermore, the place of music in the wider

space of Welsh history cannot be navigated using the indicators routinely deployed to mark out the major developments in European and British music history. For example, the circumstances that defined the great style periods of western art music have limited utility, because while Welsh music has never been isolated from cultural trends that occurred elsewhere, there are genres and practices that are unique and that are explained neither helpfully nor accurately as variants of other better-known species. Added to this are the musicians who have shaped Welsh music history; most are invisible to musical worlds outside Wales but are shown here to be major figures. Such features may well be found to different degrees in most music cultures, but here they have unusual substance because of the extent to which musical and extra-musical factors are intermingled. Welsh music history presented in isolation from the wider history of the country is seriously impoverished. We hope that our organisation of the book, which at one end touches the earliest known literary sources that refer to Welsh music and at the other the place of Welsh music in the age of digitisation, conveys a fitting sense of these ideas.

Sources

This book is concerned with music history. It is not a reference work, but it contains material that will be helpful to those without an extensive knowledge of Wales and its history; this includes the prefatory notes given below, a glossary of Welsh words and phrases that frequently occur in the book and summary bibliographical appendices. An important enhancement is the ability to provide links to much of the most important primary source material cited in the book. The National Library of Wales's digitisation programme gives open access to a vast quantity of its materials and reference facilities. They include the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography/Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig*,¹ which gives information (in both Welsh and English) about thousands of Welsh subjects, most of whom are not memorialised in other standard biographical sources. *Welsh Newspapers*² provides free and searchable access to most newspapers published in Wales, in English or Welsh, before 1919, and *Welsh Journals*³ offers free access to many periodicals relating

¹ *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig/Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Website. <https://biography.wales> (accessed 21 June 2021).

² Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/The National Library of Wales. *Welsh Newspapers*. Website. <https://newspapers.library.wales> (accessed 21 June 2021).

³ Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/The National Library of Wales. *Welsh Journals*. Website. <https://journals.library.wales> (accessed 29 July 2021).

to Wales between 1735 and 2007, including academic and scientific publications as well as literary and popular magazines. Additionally, the National Library has digitised many early manuscripts and published works that are key primary sources for Welsh music history. These include early hymn and hymn-tune books, manuscript commonplace books and printed collections of traditional vocal and instrumental music. Staff at the National Library have helped us and given us privileged access to lists of digitised material which have enabled us to provide links to many primary source materials cited in the book. The links are given in footnotes, in almost all cases as permalinks (links that are intended to be permanent and unlikely to change). More information about these permalinks is given below.

Other important texts relating to Welsh social and cultural history are also included in the Library's online catalogue, which includes summary pages on music such as its Archives of Welsh Composers.⁴ A wider selection of sources than those cited in footnotes in the chapters is summarily listed, described and aligned to the relevant permalinks in Appendix 3.

While we are confident in our claim that this is the first book to be devoted to the entire expanse of Welsh music history, it would be wrong not to acknowledge the value of existing literature that covers a wide range of topics and from which we have benefited. The first significant contributions to a scholarly literature of Welsh music date from the eighteenth century and the 'historical essays' which appeared in prefaces to collections such as *Antient British Music* (1742) by John Parry (Ruabon) and *Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards* (1784) by Edward Jones (Bardd y Brenin). It became common for song and hymn collections to contain prefatory texts, and while the accuracy of such writings is often suspect, at the time of their publication they were influential on contemporary knowledge. From the nineteenth century onwards, there has been a wealth of periodical literature devoted to, or containing articles about, Welsh music. These include titles such as *Y Cerddor Cymreig* (The Welsh Musician; 1861–73); *Y Cerddor* (The Musician; 1889–1921); *Cylchgrawn Cymdeithas Alawon Gwerin Cymru* (*Journal of the Welsh Folk-Song Society*), which has run continuously since 1909, renamed *Canu Gwerin* (Folk Song) in 1978; and *Welsh Music/Cerddoriaeth Cymru*, published by the Guild for the Promotion of Welsh Music between 1959 and 2009 (latterly called the Welsh Music Guild). The most important and

⁴ Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/The National Library of Wales. *Archives of Welsh Composers*. Website. www.library.wales/collections/learn-more/archives/archives-of-welsh-composers (accessed 28 July 2021).

influential modern journal dedicated to Welsh music is *Welsh Music History/Hanes Cerddoriaeth Cymru*; edited at Bangor University and published by the University of Wales Press, it had seven issues between 1996 and 2007.

Monographs and other books devoted to topics about Welsh music have made a significant contribution to knowledge of the subjects they address. For instance, Sally Harper's *Music in Welsh Culture before 1650* (2007) elucidated the early history of Welsh music with an unprecedented level of detail and intelligence. Phyllis Kinney's *Welsh Traditional Music* (2011) offered the most lucid and richly illustrated overview of traditional song in Wales, while Wyn Thomas's *Cerddoriaeth Draddodiadol Yng Nghymru: Llyfryddiaeth/Traditional Music in Wales: Bibliography* (3rd ed., 2006) provided the most comprehensive bibliography of Welsh traditional music. The writings on music of the Welsh historian Gareth Williams include two important monographs on Welsh choralism, *Valleys of Song: Music and Society in Wales 1840–1914* (1998) and *Do You Hear the People Sing? The Male Voice Choirs of Wales* (2015). David Ian Allsobrook's *Music for Wales* (1992) provides a valuable overview of the era in twentieth-century Welsh music that was dominated by the Council of Music in Wales and its dynamic chairman Sir Henry Walford Davies. Sarah Hill's *'Blerwytirhwng?' The Place of Welsh Pop Music* (2007) was the first major monograph on the development of pop music in both languages in Wales. The Welsh-language *Cydymaith i Gerddoriaeth Cymru* (Companion to Welsh Music; 2018), edited by Pwyll ap Siôn and Wyn Thomas, is an ambitious reference work which sets out to encompass the spectrum of Welsh music. The partially bilingual *'Canu at Iws' ac Ysgrifau Eraill* ('*Song for Use and Other Articles*'; 2013) is a compilation of twenty-eight articles, many of them seminal, by Roy Saer, who between 1963 and 1995 was curator at what is now called the National Museum of History at St Fagans near Cardiff. The multi-authored festschrift volume *Cynheiliaid y Gân/Bearers of Song* (2007), edited by Sally Harper and Wyn Thomas, is dedicated to Phyllis Kinney and Meredydd Evans, who jointly and individually have had a formidable influence on modern understandings of Welsh traditional song.

Some significant contributions to the understanding of Welsh music are less obvious, either by their location in large-scale projects in which music is but a part, or by their residence in a range of journals or other media. Rhidian Griffiths, who spent the greatest part of his career at the National Library of Wales, has been a prolific contributor to many journals and multi-authored books. The same can be said of Daniel Huws; best known

as a seminal authority on early manuscripts, he has also published extensively on Welsh song, including the folk-song collecting of Maria Jane Williams and Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg). This latter work was part of the research project 'Iolo Morganwg and the Romantic Tradition in Wales' at the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies.⁵

Recordings of Welsh music are the most obviously illustrative sources on repertoire and style, and this is as true for light and popular music as for classical repertoire. Numerous recordings are available commercially, but the National Screen and Sound Archive of Wales at the National Library provides many that are not otherwise accessible.⁶ The work of Meredydd Evans is especially important to the history of traditional song. He published many valuable learned articles, but through his exceptional gifts as a singer, his recordings serve as exemplars of the repertoire. His performances are captured in commercial recordings and also in interviews and song recordings made by the Smithsonian Institution as part of its Folkways project.⁷

Numerous journals on Welsh history have been published since the nineteenth century, including those of antiquarian and local history societies. A selective list is given in the bibliographical section of this book, but a more comprehensive catalogue of open-access content can be found by browsing the National Library of Wales's *Welsh Journals* website. Relatively few articles on Welsh music history are published in academic journals outside Wales; most of these are cited in this book.

The Welsh Language

Modern Wales is a bilingual country, and for a large part of its history, Welsh was the language of the majority.⁸ As is to be expected, the Welsh language is present throughout the book. It is a complex language

⁵ University of Wales/Prifysgol Cymru. Iolo Morganwg and the Romantic Tradition in Wales. Website. www.wales.ac.uk/en/CentreforAdvancedWelshCelticStudies/ResearchProjects/CompleteProjects/IoloMorganwgandtheRomanticTraditioninWales/IntroductiontotheProject.aspx (accessed 21 June 2021).

⁶ Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/The National Library of Wales. Sound. Website. www.library.wales/collections/learn-more/screen-sound-archive/audio-visual-collections/sound (accessed 21 June 2021).

⁷ Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. Meredydd Evans Interview. Website. <https://folkways.si.edu/meredydd-evans/spoken-word-world/music/video/smithsonian> (accessed 20 June 2021).

⁸ Aspects of the history of the Welsh language as it has impacted and continues to impact on music are explained later in this book. The equality of Welsh and English in Wales is defined by law.

belonging to the Indo-European group of languages and does not consistently resemble Romance languages. All quoted texts in the book are given in the original language with English translations. Though this is an English-language book, passages in the Welsh language are not italicised because in Britain it is not a foreign language. In footnote and bibliography citations, where a publication is solely in the Welsh language we have used Welsh bibliographical abbreviated terms (for instance, gol. for ed., t./tt. for p./pp., rhif for no.).

Readers might find it helpful to have details of some of the more distinctive features of the language. The Welsh alphabet is different from the English. In its modern form, it does not include k, q, v, x or z (although some of these letters – k, for instance – sometimes appear in earlier Welsh orthography). The letters w and y are vowels (though ‘w’ can also function as a consonant before another vowel). Some pairs of letters form alphabetical characters in their own right: ch, dd, ff, ll, rh and th. Readers unfamiliar with the language may be confused by an apparent inconsistency in the way some words appear. This is a consequence of the mutations that are a feature of Welsh: the initial letters of a word may change according to its grammatical context. For example, Caerdydd, the Welsh word for Cardiff, the Welsh capital, can also appear as Gaerdydd, Chaerdydd or Nghaerdydd. It follows that even the best Welsh/English dictionaries are not always easy to use.

Welsh Personal Names and Pseudonyms

Welsh musicians and poets have often been known by a pseudonym as well as their proper name. This may be a consequence of the fact that so many people share a relatively small number of family names (Jones, Owen, Thomas, Davies and so on), but there were also other reasons. For example, the poet and musician John Owen (1821–83) was usually referred to by his bardic name ‘Owain Alaw’ (‘alaw’ meaning ‘melody’). There was no consistency in the way these names were acquired: some were awarded by the eisteddfod gorsedd, others were just assumed. Sometimes they were indicative of status – for example, Edward Jones (1752–1824) was known as ‘Bardd y Brenin’, literally ‘the King’s bard’. Griffith Rhys Jones (1834–97), a renowned nineteenth-century choral conductor, acquired the nickname ‘Caradog’ in his youth and was most often referred to by that name. The singer and song collector Maria Jane Williams (1795–1873) was referred to as ‘Llinos’ (the linnet) because of the beauty of her voice. We have usually given both the proper name and the pseudonym on its first occurrence in a chapter, but thereafter used the name by which the subject was most

frequently known. Subjects' proper names and pseudonyms are cross-referenced in the index.

Boundaries and Place Names

The present division of Wales into administrative regions is but the latest of several methods that have been used for administrating the country. Maps P.1–P.4 show the shire or county divisions used at various times between the sixteenth century and the present day. Maps showing Wales in earlier periods are given at the start of Chapter 2.

Many place names in Wales are markedly different in their Welsh and English forms (for example, the city of Swansea is Abertawe in Welsh), and other variances in spellings in both languages reflect orthographical transitions that occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We have used the modern English spellings throughout the book, unless a different version occurs in quotation or (as is the case with chapters dealing with early periods) where common sense requires something different. The boundaries, names and organisation of Welsh administrative counties have changed several times. We have used the names relevant to the period and context in which each place name is used.

'The March', or more specifically the March of Wales or Welsh Marches – terms used frequently in earlier periods of Welsh history – refers to the border region between England and Wales. The word 'march' derives from an ancient Anglo-Saxon word meaning boundary. The Scottish Marches is similarly used to describe the border region that separates England from Scotland.

Dates and Eras

Unless indicated otherwise, the Gregorian calendar is used throughout the book. Citations of Welsh-language periodical publications are given only in Welsh. This is because the Welsh version is the correct formal citation. However, for good measure the translation of months of the year is as follows.

Ionawr	January
Chwefror	February
Mawrth	March
Ebrill	April
Mai	May
Mehffin	June

Gorffennaf	July
Awst	August
Medi	September
Hydref	October
Tachwedd	November
Rhagfyr	December

Hypertext Links and Permalinks

Internet sources are cited in footnotes, with the most recent date of access in parenthesis. Where possible, permalinks are given for referenced sources that we have discovered to be digitised, the vast majority of which are at the National Library of Wales. Permalinks, as the name suggests, are intended to be permanent and unchanging; for that reason and by convention, dates of access are unnecessary. It is important to stress that the permalinks included in footnotes and the larger collection included in Appendix 3 are not comprehensive for two reasons. Firstly, the project at the National Library of Wales is ongoing and the list of available sources is continuously expanding; and secondly, certain sources, particularly printed works dating from the eighteenth century, may have had several different editions, some or all of which have been digitised. We have cited only those that are directly relevant to the matter at hand in any given chapter; in some instances, other editions with attendant variances may be available in digitised form.

Note on Pitch Names

Pitch names for musical notes use the Helmholtz abbreviation system shown below in Example P.1, except for Chapter 3, where, to denote

Example P.1 Helmholtz notation system

The image shows a musical staff with two systems of notes. The upper system is in treble clef and the lower system is in bass clef. The notes are labeled with Helmholtz pitch names: C'' B'', C' B', C B, c b, c' b', c'' b'', c''' b''', c'''' b'''' and c'''''. The notes are arranged in ascending order from left to right. The first two notes (C'' B'') are in the bass clef, and the remaining notes (C' B' through c'''' b'''') are in the treble clef. A dashed line with a bracket above the treble clef staff indicates the range from C'' to c''''.

relative rather than absolute pitches, octaves are indicated by the use of superscript Arabic numerals.

References to Unpublished Materials

Throughout the book we have used the sigla reference system devised by RISM (*Répertoire International des Sources Musicales*). In this system a country code is followed by other abbreviations that define the holding institution precisely. The institution's catalogue identifier is then added for the relevant manuscript. The institutional identifiers used in this book are given below.

GB-AB	National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth
GB-BGul	University Library, Bangor
GB-CDf	St Fagans National Museum of History, Cardiff
GB-CDp	Cardiff Central Library
GB-Dru	University Library, Durham
GB-Lbl	British Library, London
GB-Lcm	Royal College of Music, London
GB-LF	Cathedral Library, Lichfield
GB-Lna	National Archives, London
GB-Ob	Bodleian Library, Oxford
GB-Och	Christ Church Library and Archives, Oxford
GB-Omc	Magdalen College Library, Oxford
GB-SHR	Shropshire Archives, Shrewsbury
US-NYp	New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Music Division, New York

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Glossary

The Glossary is limited to words and phrases that appear recurrently in the book or which have other importance. Words appear in their singular or plural form according to the way they are usually encountered.

alaw	Melody. Used in various pseudonyms (Owain Alaw, Llewelyn Alaw and so on).
anterliwt	Interlude. A metrical play for popular entertainment, often poking fun at the establishment.
awdl	Long poem written in traditional strict metre.
bardd teulu	Lit. 'family bard'; bard of the king's household or retinue; an office of a Welsh royal court.
Blue Books	Name given (because of the colour of the volumes' covers) to the 1847 <i>Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales</i> , which caused great offence to Welsh people.
boneddigion	Gentlemen, the landed gentry.
cerdd dafod	Lit. 'tongue craft'; poetry.
cerdd dant	Lit. 'string craft'; the singing of verse in counterpoint to harp accompaniment.
clerwr	Minstrel – the lowest order of poet, an itinerant popular entertainer. (Pl. clêr.)
crwth	A stringed instrument played with a bow. Used in other European countries but especially associated with Wales. A Middle English borrowing from the Welsh gives it as 'crowd'.
Cŵl Cymru/ Cool Cymru	Lit. 'Cool Wales'. The collective name given to progressive young Welsh pop musicians and