

WALES - THE LAND OF SONG

Culture is the cement of the Welsh identity, and this is easily assessed when one is faced with the richness of its poetry, its dances, its language and most of all, its music. It becomes no surprise to learn that Wales is sometimes referred to as “the land of song.” Since at least the 12th century, Welsh bards and musicians have participated in musical, theatrical and poetic contests called *eisteddfodau*, a tradition pursued up until this day.

Welsh folk music was suppressed following the Act of Union (1707), which promoted the English language and the rise of the Methodist church. The church frowned on traditional music and dance. Folk tunes were sometimes used as hymns in the 18th century. However, choral music was preferred over instrumental and traditional musical styles soon became associated with drunkenness and immorality.

A revival began in the 1860s with the formation of the National Eisteddfod Society, followed by the foundation of London-area Welsh Societies. The publication in 1890 of Nicholas Bennett’s *Alawon fy Ngwlad* (“Tunes of my Land”), a compilation of traditional tunes, did a lot for the promotion of Welsh music.

Wales began seeing a revival of its traditional roots due to the popularity of folk singer-songwriter Dafydd Iwan in the 1960s. Iwan was instrumental in the creation of the modern Welsh folk scene, and is known for fiercely patriotic and nationalistic songs.

The folksongs presented on this recording, a mix of familiar and not-so-familiar, date back to the 1800s. Having done some research, I discovered a passion

for the music of my roots. Through the miraculous union of beautiful yet simple melody and poignant poetry, these tender and lyrical songs have become very personal to me. They transcend time and gender, melding themes of innocent youth and love, joy and sadness, birth and death and tell the journey of an honest and passionate people.

Love is a common theme amongst these folksongs, whether it is unrequited young love as in *Y Deryn Pur*, *Fenyw Fwyn*, *Ar lan y Môr* or *Bugeilio'r Gwenith Gwyn*, the hope that love will change the memory of a sad past into a joyous future as in *Y Gog Lwydlas*, *Y Fwyalchen* or *Codiad yr Hedydd*, or a more mature love, as in the one a Mother holds for her child, in the famous Welsh lullaby *Suo Gân*.

Birds also present a frequent theme. However, these songs are not so much about the birds themselves as the image they project and their ability to carry hope on their wings as in *Y Deryn pur*, *Y Gog Lwydlas*, *Y Fwyalchen* and *Codiad yr Hedydd*.

Memory is another recurrent theme, as in the old maid who is tediously weaving on the loom as she recalls her hardships and her broken heartedness in *Y G ydd*. And finally the tragic and haunting *Dafydd y Gareg Wen* recounts David’s (said to have been a Bard on his deathbed) wish to play his harp once more as an angel appears leading him to the path of heaven. The harp is an important instrument in Welsh folk music and is the symbol of Wales—the Welsh created a harp called the “telyn deries” or triple harp that has three rows of strings.

To those who know me as a classical vocalist, this Welsh folksong album may seem odd. But this music, this Welsh culture and heritage IS the reason I became a singer. My direct connection to Wales is somewhat unusual. My father’s mother was left in a basket on the steps of an orphanage in June of 1913 in Gelligaer, Glamorgan, South Wales. My father immigrated to Montreal in 1967 along with my mother and my three eldest siblings. Later the family moved to Ottawa where two additional children were born—the youngest was me. My father always showed a passion and love for music. He discovered the Ottawa Welsh Society and began to sing with the Gwalia Singers. As a girl, I was able to carry on this inherited tradition when, at the age of 15, I travelled to Llangollen, Wales to sing in the prestigious Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod. I returned to Canada as a proud ambassador, bringing home the winning silver cup!

This is the culture that shaped my path in life and fills me with so much love for music and song. I am so pleased to be able to make this recording as a special tribute to all those people who supported and encouraged me from the beginning.

I would like to dedicate this album to the memory of my Father.

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A word about the arrangements

Welsh songs can be heard as either folk or classical music. When setting out to arrange these songs for Shannon, I tried to place them right on the line between the two styles. Calling on musicians I know and have worked with on previous line-riding explorations, I found myself with cello, bass, flute, percussion, and two violins. The accordion was then given an extra inner-voice melody (and/or drone) and the cittern replaced the guitar or lute. The harp, the Welsh national instrument, was a natural addition. The one used on this recording is a 17th-century Italian model that is similar to the style of triple-harp that is still used in Wales.

Once the musicians were assembled, I moved on to explore which instrument voicing and texture best suited each song. Many of these songs are very well-known and have been heard often before and a great deal of time was spent deciding which elements of previous arrangements (harmony, counter-melody, even rhythm) to keep and which to set aside. Some of the instrumental pieces on this recording are actually song melodies while others are dance tunes. I feel we have maintained the essence of the songs while still offering a new listening experience.

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Song lyrics are available for download on www.analekta.com