

[Skip to content](#)

[Skip to navigation menu](#)



Information Services

Painting the World Green: Dafydd Iwan and the Welsh Protest Ballad (2005)

by Dr E. Wyn James
School of Welsh, Cardiff University

First published in *Folk Music Journal*, 8:5 (2005), pp. 594-618. ISSN 0531-9684.

This article is based on a paper delivered at the 29th International Ballad Conference, hosted by the Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, Scotland, August 1999.

Copyright © E. Wyn James, 2005, 2006

Abstract

Dafydd Iwan, the current President of the Welsh nationalist party, Plaid Cymru, has been a key figure in the significant renewal of national identity Wales has witnessed since the 1960s. While his contribution has been many-faceted, it is arguably as a singer-songwriter that he has been most influential. A master of satirical, political song, his work is a complex plethora of indigenous Welsh and Anglo-American influences, which can only be fully appreciated by being placed in the context of the preservation and modernization of Welsh culture on the one hand, and of the post-war folk revival and the international rights and justice movement of the 1960s on the other. Although not well-known outside Wales, Dafydd Iwan is a figure of international significance, both as an embodiment in a specific cultural context of the singer-songwriter par excellence and as a concrete example of the power and influence of popular song.

The first years of the 1960s were rather bleak times for the Welsh nationalist movement. They were days of increasing tension and frustration for nationalists of all descriptions — both for cultural nationalists, whose main concern was the

preservation of the Welsh language and its associated culture, and for those who were working more actively towards a political expression of Welsh national identity.

The Welsh nationalist party, Plaid Cymru (lit. 'The Party of Wales'), founded in 1925, was in a period of crisis following its failure to win any seats in the 1959 General Election to the Westminster Parliament and its disappointing performance in the subsequent local government elections of 1962, despite strenuous efforts by some younger elements in the party to make it more attractive to the voters of the increasingly anglicized and predominantly socialist mining valleys of south-east Wales. Indeed the party had not won a single seat at a general election in all thirty-five years of its existence, and many of its young supporters were fast losing patience.[\[1\]](#)

A major cause of frustration in Wales as a whole during the period was the impotence of Welsh opinion to prevent the Liverpool Corporation from drowning the village of Capel Celyn, in the Tryweryn valley near Bala in north Wales, in order to increase the city's water supply. This project proceeded relentlessly, despite widespread cross-party protest throughout Wales, from the first planning stages in the mid 1950s until the final completion of the reservoir in 1965. The Bala area is noted for its rich Welsh-medium cultural life, and the village of Capel Celyn was perceived as being a stronghold of the Welsh language and its traditional rural culture which was being sacrificed on the altar of an English city's needs. An indication of the vibrant popular culture of the area is that one of the best-known Welsh ballad singers of the mid twentieth century, Robert Roberts (1870-1951), better known as 'Bob Tai'r Felin', lived near Capel Celyn; and it is worth noting that this lively old ballad-singer and entertainer was to make a lasting impression on the subject of the present article, Dafydd Iwan, when he performed at an informal concert in the mining village in south-west Wales where Dafydd Iwan lived as a small boy.[\[2\]](#)

The name 'Tryweryn' reverberates through Dafydd Iwan's songs from his earliest compositions to the present, and he is far from being alone in regarding the drowning of the Tryweryn valley as a cornerstone of his nationalism.[\[3\]](#) 'Cofia Dryweryn' ('Remember Tryweryn') became a commonplace of Welsh graffiti for many years following the drowning of the valley. The frustration at the drowning of Tryweryn was such that it led to the extreme step, in a country which has a strong pacifist tradition, of some young nationalists using explosives on more than one occasion in 1962-63 to try to destroy equipment on the construction site. This led in turn to some imprisonments, including that of a prominent and fiery young nationalist leader called Emyr Llewelyn Jones.[\[4\]](#)

The destruction of the community in the Tryweryn valley was seen as symbolic of the general and rapid decline of the Welsh language and its traditional culture. Indeed, by the early 1960s it was increasingly acknowledged that the future of the language was very much in the balance. In 1880, almost a million Welsh speakers, most of them monoglot, made up 70% of the population of Wales; by the 1961 Census, a little over half a million ? a mere 26% of the population ? spoke Welsh, with very few monoglots. In addition, the language as an everyday community language was being increasingly restricted to the rural areas of north

and west Wales; and even in those heartlands, the 90% Welsh speakers of the 1901 Census had fallen to around 75% by 1961. Indeed, by 1961 Welsh speakers were being lost at the rate of 200 per week, or one every three-quarters of an hour. [5] No wonder Professors Aitchison and Carter in their *A Geography of the Welsh Language 1961-1991* could state: 'By 1961 the situation appeared parlous' (p. 41).

It is difficult to over-emphasise the seriousness of this linguistic decline from the point of view of Welsh identity, for — in contrast with Scotland, for example — the language has been from the very beginning of the Welsh nation the main badge and bulwark of Welsh national identity. [6] To quote Dafydd Iwan: 'The Welsh language, in the final analysis, is that which gives the Welsh nation its substance'; [7] or in the words of a Welsh proverb which was often quoted in the 1960s and 1970s: 'Cenedl heb iaith, cenedl heb galon' ('A nation without a language is a nation without a heart').

Saunders Lewis (1893-1985), the founding father and reclusive prophet of twentieth-century Welsh nationalism, warned in a seminal radio lecture entitled 'Tynged yr Iaith' ('The Fate of the Language'), broadcast by the BBC in February 1962, that if current trends were to continue Welsh would cease to exist as a living language by about the beginning of the twenty-first century. He called for drastic action, including civil disobedience, to prevent that happening: 'It will be nothing less than a revolution to restore the Welsh language in Wales. Success is only possible through revolutionary methods.' [8]

Saunders Lewis's radio lecture was a veiled appeal for Plaid Cymru - the party he had founded in 1925, whose early ideology he had moulded and dominated as its president from 1926 to 1939, but from whom he was by then estranged - to make the Welsh language central to its activities and to use unconstitutional means, where necessary, to safeguard the language in those areas where it was still the daily community language; indeed, to make those areas ungovernable except through the medium of Welsh. What happened, in fact, was the formation of a new organization in July 1962, Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg ('The Welsh Language Society'), a pressure group willing to use non-violent civil disobedience in order to reverse the fortunes of the Welsh language and to repeal the clause in the Act of Union of 1536 which banned Welsh as an official language of government in Wales. [9]

Saunders Lewis's lecture must not be regarded in isolation. As one writer has put it: 'Darlith Saunders Lewis oedd y fydwraig; Tryweryn oedd y fam' ('Saunders Lewis's lecture was the [Society's] midwife; Tryweryn was the mother'); [10] and there were already significant stirrings in the direction of forming a language movement prior to his lecture. But it is certainly correct to regard that lecture as being one of the great turning points of Welsh cultural and political life in the twentieth century and a catalyst for the formation of one of the most influential movements in post-war Wales. It is the height of irony, then, that it was delivered by a man who, during a BBC interview in May 1960, had declared himself a total failure: 'I had a desire, not a small desire, but a very great one, to change the history of Wales. To change the whole course of Wales, and make Welsh Wales something living, strong, powerful, belonging to

the modern world. And I failed absolutely. '[11]

To oversimplify matters drastically, one sees a new energy and purpose enter the Welsh nationalist movement as the 1960s progress, with three strands developing: a small group of militant nationalists, willing to use violent methods if necessary to achieve their goals; a constitutional nationalism, represented by Plaid Cymru, committed to working within the political system and anxious to attract votes from all sections of Welsh life, both Welsh-speaking and non-Welsh-speaking alike; and, in the middle ground, the Welsh Language Society, willing to use all means short of violence to achieve its central aim of the preservation and restoration of the language. Although there were tensions between these groupings, individuals were often active in more than one. A good example is Dafydd Iwan Jones — a cousin of the Emyr Llewelyn Jones who was imprisoned for bombing the Tryweryn dam site. (Both have long since dropped the 'Jones' from their names, part of a trend among Welsh nationalists to reject anglicized name forms.)

Dafydd Iwan is a key figure in contemporary Welsh cultural and political life, and one who played a major role in the 1960s 'in mobilising the Welsh popular music scene in a nationalist linguistic direction'. [12] The grandson of one of the founders of Plaid Cymru, he joined the party as a schoolboy. He soon became prominent in its ranks and was elected Chair of Plaid Cymru's Youth Section in the early 1960s. He has remained a committed member of the party over the years; however, he joined the Welsh Language Society as a twenty-year-old student shortly after its formation, and over the following ten years was to concentrate his energies primarily on the Society and its direct-action campaigns, involving himself in 'endless marches, demonstrations and rallies' and facing prosecutions, fines and imprisonments on numerous occasions for non-violent civil disobedience. [13]

The formation of the Welsh Language Society coincided with Dafydd Iwan's emergence as a singer-songwriter, and indeed with the rise of the Welsh pop-song movement in general. The Society's activities were an important influence on the development and subject-matter of Welsh pop music, and on Dafydd Iwan in particular. He could say in 1977: 'This determined struggle [for the survival of the Welsh language]...has shaped my life, my work and my songs.' [14] Conversely, Welsh pop, and Dafydd Iwan in particular, was a vital element in the growth of popular support for the activities of the Welsh Language Society, and the Welsh nationalist movement as a whole, as the 1960s progressed. To quote from Ned Thomas's influential book, *The Welsh Extremist*, first published in 1971:

At its best [Welsh pop] is satirical or political song running very close to Welsh reality and comparable with the Russian satirical songs of Galich or Vysotsky rather than anything one finds in England. The master of this genre is Dafydd Iwan....

Through the popular song, through Dafydd Iwan in particular, the ideas of the Welsh [nationalist] leadership have been able to get through...to the ordinary Welsh-speaker, especially in the younger generation. A sure sign that they *are* getting through is the fact that

Welsh members of parliament have from time to time spoken of the pop movement as if it were a sinister conspiracy.[\[15\]](#)

This echoes, of course, the words of that famous poet of the Welsh Borders, George Herbert (1593-1633), 'A verse may find him who a sermon flies'; and Dafydd Iwan's ability to communicate the ideals of the Welsh nationalist movement to the popular imagination has been pivotal to the sea-change in Welsh national consciousness and in the fortunes of the Welsh language witnessed since the 1960s. As one recent commentator has put it:

Mae canu Dafydd Iwan yn gofeb byw i'r hyn y byddai Marcseydd diwylliannol yn ei chwennydd, sef creu 'synnwyr cyffredin' newydd; ideoleg chwyldroadol a ddaw yn ganllawiau diarwybod i ymddygiad y bobl. Dyna yw camp pennaf Dafydd Iwan yn ei ganu, troi'r hyn a fu'n annormal unwaith, megis gwleidyddiaeth wrth-Brydeinig, yn rhywbeth i'w ddisgwyl...Mae gwneud diwylliant lleiafrifol yn ddiwylliant hegemonaid yn gamp fawr. Mae ei ganeuon wedi newid y bydysawd diwylliannol y mae pobl yn byw ynddo.[\[16\]](#)

[Dafydd Iwan's singing is a living memorial to that to which a cultural Marxist would aspire, namely the creation of a new 'common sense'; a revolutionary ideology that becomes unconscious guidelines for the people's behaviour. That is Dafydd Iwan's main achievement in his singing, turning what was once abnormal, such as anti-British politics, into the expected...Making a minority culture a hegemonic one is a great achievement. His songs have changed the cultural universe in which people live.]

'This Land is My Land'

Dafydd Iwan was born in 1943 in Brynaman, a village on the western edge of the South Wales Coalfield, in an area where Welsh was still the predominant community language. By a strange coincidence, the previous year had seen the birth of another icon of the pop world, John Cale (of Velvet Underground fame), in the nearby village of Garnant, although their musical, cultural and ideological paths would be strikingly different in many ways.[\[17\]](#) Both John Cale's and Dafydd Iwan's mothers were teachers by profession, but while John Cale's father was a coal miner, Dafydd Iwan's was a Nonconformist minister. When Dafydd was twelve years of age, his father accepted a call to pastor a church in the village of Llanuwchllyn in the Bala area of central north Wales, a rural area very different from Brynaman, but similar to the extent that Welsh was the everyday language of the community. The family's move to Llanuwchllyn in the mid 1950s also meant that Dafydd Iwan's teenage years were spent in fairly close proximity to the Tryweryn valley at the very time the Liverpool Corporation was seeking to drown it. The move also brought him into close proximity with the senior camp of the influential youth movement, Urdd Gobaith Cymru (The Welsh League of

Youth, lit. 'The League of the Hope of Wales'), [18] situated in a converted mansion on the shores of Bala Lake. Working at the camp during school holidays brought Dafydd Iwan into contact with young Welsh-speakers from all parts of Wales, and it was there that he first began to perform informally on the guitar. [19]

There are three matters relating to Dafydd Iwan's early upbringing which ought, perhaps, to be highlighted. Firstly, it was thoroughly Welsh — apart from his secondary-school education, which was for the most part through the medium of English. Such a practice was normal at the time, even in those areas where Welsh was the predominant community language, and was satirized by Dafydd Iwan in a humorous protest song he wrote in 1967, 'Cân yr Ysgol' ('The School Song'), in which he contrasts the Welshness of the community in which he was raised with the Englishness of his schooling in that community, except for 'an occasional lesson in Welsh, fair play!/Because I was a little Welshman!' [20] By 'a thoroughly Welsh upbringing', one does not only mean that he was reared in a community in which Welsh was the normal everyday language, but also that he was steeped in traditional Welsh culture. Both of his parents were university graduates, who were well-versed in the culture of Welsh-speaking Wales and committed to promoting that culture, a commitment which included giving their children a good grounding in it.

One aspect of that grounding is the next matter which needs to be emphasised, namely that Dafydd Iwan's upbringing gave him ample opportunity to perform in public from a very early age. Dafydd was not a shy child, and during his childhood and youth he was to perform regularly in public at various religious and cultural activities organized by his father's chapel and on an inter-chapel level, not to mention the plethora of *eisteddfodau* (competitive cultural festivals) which exist in Welsh-speaking Wales in all shapes and sizes and at all levels, local, regional and national. Dafydd Iwan's upbringing, then, not only gave him a good grounding in traditional Welsh culture, but also made him an experienced public performer.

His upbringing also led naturally to his becoming a Welsh nationalist in political terms. His parents were both ardent nationalists, and (as has already been noted) his paternal grandfather, Fred Jones - another Nonconformist minister - was one of the founding members of Plaid Cymru in 1925. Indeed, being a member of Plaid Cymru was such a family affair that Dafydd Iwan could claim in 1966 that around 120 members of his family were party members. [21]

But there is another sense in which his upbringing led naturally to his becoming a Welsh nationalist. For historical and geographical reasons, loyalty to the nation and national identity has often played second fiddle in Wales to more local or regional allegiances. Part of the reason for this is the divisive nature of Wales's mountainous terrain; another is that Wales has never experienced a strong central national government and has had until very recently few national institutions. Furthermore, from the late Middle Ages, the ruling classes in Wales became increasingly anglicized in language and culture, and more and more London-centric in their concerns and abode, with no middle class of any significance developing until the rapid growth of urbanization and

industrialization during the nineteenth century. In recent centuries, then, the nearest Welsh cultural life has often come to an 'aristocracy' in terms of national leadership, has been the social grouping one might describe as 'ministers of religion and teachers', a grouping whose members, as a result of educational opportunities and the often peripatetic nature of their calling, are not normally as deep-rooted in one particular community and have horizons which are frequently broader than most. It is no surprise, then, to see one author note that 'schoolmasters and ministers...have formed the backbone of so many aspects of the nationalist movement in Wales'.^[22] Neither is such a grouping unfamiliar to ballad students, since throughout Europe 'ministers of religion and teachers' have often in the past been the first port of call in a given community for collectors of folk traditions seeking informants.^[23]

We see this heightened sense of national rather than local identity not only in Dafydd Iwan's immediate family background, but also in his own personal experience. For example, he begins the autobiography he published in 1981 by stating that his upbringing and dispersed family roots mean that he does not feel a strong sense of belonging to any one particular locality; rather, he says, his commitment is to Wales as a unit.^[24] This is stated very clearly in one of Dafydd Iwan's earliest songs, 'Mae'n Wlad i Mi', based on 'This Land is Your Land' by the influential American singer-songwriter, Woody Guthrie. The song's theme is that every part of Wales is the heritage of every Welsh person. Here are the first verse and chorus:

*Mi fûm yn crwydro hyd lwybrau unig
Ar foelydd meithion yr hen Arennig,
A chlywn yr awel yn dweud yn dawel:
'Mae'r wlad hon yn eiddo i ti a mi.'*

*Cytgan:
Mae'n wlad i mi ac mae'n wlad i tithau,
O gopa'r Wyddfa i lawr i'w thraethau,
O'r De i'r Gogledd, o Fôn i Fynwy,
Mae'r wlad hon yn eiddo i ti a mi.
© Cyhoeddiadau Sain*

[In wandering along lonely pathways
On the vast moorland of the old Arennig [mountain, near Bala],
I would hear the breeze whisper softly:
'This land belongs to you and me.'

*Chorus:
This land is my land, this land is your land,
From Snowdon's summit down to its beaches,*

From south to north Wales, from Anglesey to Monmouth,
This land belongs to you and me.]

A Sixties' singer-songwriter

The growth of higher education in Wales, which began in earnest in the second half of the nineteenth century, has in many ways been a force for anglicization. For example, the record of the federal University of Wales, created by royal charter in 1893, as regards the promotion of the Welsh language and its culture has, with notable exceptions, been abysmal. Yet, conversely and concurrently, that same University has helped strengthen national as opposed to regional loyalties in Wales by virtue of its being a national institution and through drawing together people from all parts of Wales (and beyond) to the University's geographically scattered campuses.

In October 1961 Dafydd Iwan followed in his parents' footsteps and became an undergraduate student in the University of Wales during a period of marked increase in the number of students proceeding to higher education. After a preparatory year at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (in mid-Wales) in 1961-62, he went to University College, Cardiff (in south-east Wales) to study architecture, graduating in 1968. Although there was a lively Welsh-language sub-culture at Aberystwyth, Dafydd Iwan says that the immediate effect of moving to Aberystwyth from a strongly Welsh-medium community was to make him realize fully for the first time that Welsh-speakers were a minority in their own country.[\[25\]](#) This feeling intensified when he moved to the even more anglicized university college at Cardiff. He did not settle well in Cardiff, and his songs in the 1960s reflect a general unease with urban life and a longing for the countryside and for the closer-knit community life of rural Welsh-speaking Wales. It is not surprising then to see him moving from Cardiff to north-west Wales in early 1970, where he has lived ever since.

However, Dafydd Iwan's removal to Cardiff in 1962 had brought him into close proximity with the hub of the new and developing Welsh television industry, and he soon found himself being 'discovered' and given a weekly slot on a news and current affairs programme called 'Y Dydd' ('The Day'). As a result he became (to quote the blurb on the sleeve of his first record in 1966), 'perhaps the first modern Welsh language singer to become a teenage idol'. Furthermore, his being propelled into the public eye coincided with the formation of the Welsh Language Society; and as has already been suggested, his development as a singer and the development of the Society were to be closely linked for at least a decade.

To find a young pop singer playing a leading role in a pressure group and protest movement composed mainly of students is by no means unique in Europe and North America in the 1960s. And one must readily acknowledge that the Welsh Language Society, the Welsh pop scene and Dafydd Iwan himself are part of a wider youth culture and a culture of protest and of 'doing one's own thing' that so characterized the 1960s — the pressure groups founded in that decade in Britain alone can be numbered in hundreds.[\[26\]](#) Nonetheless, it is important to emphasise that the battle for the preservation of the Welsh language and its

culture in the 1960s was not merely an expression of a contemporary youth and protest culture, but was rather a cause which drew support from all ages and sections of the community in Wales, in what was, after all, a life-and-death struggle for the very future of the language. [\[27\]](#)

In that context, it is not inappropriate to label Welsh as one of those 'resistance cultures' in which singer-songwriters have played a key role in 'integrating and mobilizing...demands for liberation and autonomy'; [\[28\]](#) and it is certainly not difficult to find counterparts to Dafydd Iwan in other colonial and threatened-culture situations. He himself has noted, for example, the strong similarities between him and Miro Casabella of Galicia in Spain. [\[29\]](#) Neither is it difficult to place him within the singer-songwriter movement of the 1960s and 1970s which was pioneered by Bob Dylan under the influence of Woodie Guthrie and Pete Seeger. While Dafydd Iwan is categorical that Bob Dylan had little influence on him musically, he readily acknowledges his influence on him 'as a model of political protest'. [\[30\]](#) Dafydd Iwan would also readily acknowledge that he is a product of the social justice, civil rights, anti-war and pro-environmental movements of the 1960s, and it is right to see his songs as a Welsh expression of this radical international rights and justice movement. 'In fighting for the Welsh language,' he once said, 'we're fighting against injustice in every country...fighting for the people of Vietnam, Biafra, the second-class citizen in every country.'[\[31\]](#)

However, while it is essential to place Dafydd Iwan in such an international context, to understand and appreciate him fully he must also be viewed in his Welsh setting. For example, while songs were a key element in the promotion of radical causes in general during the 1960s, it is particularly appropriate that the lyrics of Dafydd Iwan were so influential in a Welsh context, since the Welsh bardic tradition from its very beginnings has been one in which the poet is perceived, not as a romantic recluse so much as the voice and defender, not to mention light-hearted entertainer, of his community. It is no surprise, then, to learn that Dafydd Iwan himself comes from a prominent family of community poets. Indeed, one would not be amiss in regarding Dafydd Iwan's songs as a natural extension of his family's poetic function in their community and their contribution to that community's life and values.[\[32\]](#)

Chairman Dafydd and Prince Charles

Dafydd Iwan was chairman of the Welsh Language Society from 1968 to 1971, a period which must be regarded as one of the high points in the Society's history. His chairmanship of the Society also coincided with the investiture of Prince Charles as Prince of Wales at Caernarfon Castle, in north-west Wales, in July 1969. The 1960s had witnessed significant growth in political nationalism in Wales. Plaid Cymru had won its first parliamentary seat at Westminster in 1966 and had polled remarkably well in subsequent by-elections in Labour strongholds in the industrial valleys of south-east Wales. All would agree by now that Prince Charles's investiture was an attempt by the political establishment in Britain to stem the tide of growing Welsh nationalism by playing on traditional Welsh

loyalty to the Crown, in order to strengthen support for the union with England among the Welsh population.[\[33\]](#) Many felt that the best policy for the Welsh Language Society would have been to ignore the event altogether, or even use the fact that Prince Charles was being taught some Welsh as a means of promoting the language.[\[34\]](#) Ultimately, however, the Society decided to actively oppose the investiture; and the song which became the 'anthem' of its protest was a light-hearted satirical song by Dafydd Iwan. It was the first of a number of similar songs written by him over the years which has the British monarchy as their butt, songs which reflect his opposition to the monarchy not only as a symbol of 'Britishness' (in the modern, unionist sense of the term),[\[35\]](#) but also as representative of privilege and élitism in general.

Dafydd Iwan's anthem against the investiture was entitled 'Carlo', a Welsh form of 'Charles' normally reserved for use as a dog's name; and the song (in his own words) was to make him during that period

the most hated popular singer in Wales...[as the] Welsh people's inherent monarchial servility [was gradually whipped up by the British propoganda machine] to such an extent that any one appearing to take an opposite view immediately grew horns and cleft feet. Charles, on the other hand, had wings and a halo.[\[36\]](#)

It is perhaps worth adding that — while significantly damaging public support within Wales for the nationalist movement in the short term[\[37\]](#) — the Society's opposition to the investiture, and Dafydd Iwan's song in particular, were instrumental in making the general public outside Wales aware for the first time of the fact 'that there was a new young protest movement in Wales'.[\[38\]](#)

Here, with a literal English translation, are the first verse and chorus of that song. To better appreciate it, one should explain that in the original the Queen's words in the first couplet of the chorus are in pidgin Welsh, which starkly contrasts with the received pronunciation of her own 'Queen's English'. It is also worth drawing attention to the play on words caused by the Welsh rules of mutation of initial consonants which allow Dafydd Iwan to change the 'b' of 'Buckingham Palace' into an 'm'!

*Mae gen i ffrind bach yn byw ym Mycingam Palas
A Charlo Winsor yw ei enw e;
Tro dwetha yr es i i gnoco ar ddrws ei dy,
Daeth ei fam i'r drws a medde hi wrtha i:*

*Cytgan:
'O Carlo, Carlo, Carlo'n whare polo heddi,
Carlo, Carlo, Carlo'n whare polo gyda dadi.'
Ymunwch yn y gân, daeogion fawr a mân,
O'r diwedd mae gyda ni Brins yng Ngwlad y Gân.
© Cyhoeddiadau Sain*

[I have a little friend who lives in Muckingham Palace
And Carlo Windsor is his name;
The last time I went to knock on the door of his house,
His mother came to the door and she said to me:

Chorus

'Oh, Carlo, Carlo, Carlo, he play polo today,
Carlo, Carlo, Carlo, he play polo with daddy.'
Join in the song, serfs great and small,
At last we have a Prince in the Land of Song.] [\[39\]](#)

A number of factors contributed to the fact that Dafydd Iwan's chairmanship of the Welsh Language Society between 1968 and 1971 was such a dynamic period in its history. One was his own charismatic leadership, bolstered by his songs. Another was the intransigent anti-Welsh stance of the then Secretary of State for Wales, George Thomas, later Viscount Tonypanfyllt. [\[40\]](#) It was also a period of very tangible aims and objectives for the Society, with the main campaigns centring on securing bilingual road signs and the provision of Welsh or bilingual forms and documents by local and central government.

At the beginning of his singing career, Dafydd Iwan's songs were usually general patriotic statements, and this is also true of a fair proportion of his later songs; but in the period of his chairmanship of the Welsh Language Society, his songs tend to be more specific, reflecting the direct-action campaigns he was leading at the time. 'Songs thrive on stuff such as this,' he said in 1977, 'and it is no wonder that many of my songs have run closely parallel to actual campaigns. Some are mere commentaries, others are deliberate battle hymns, and occasionally a satirical tilt at obvious political targets.' [\[41\]](#)

One very popular 'battle hymn' from this period, 'Peintio'r Byd yn Wyrdd' ('Painting the World Green') — a Celtic green rather than an imperial-British or a Communist red — was written at the height of the road-signs campaign, when the wording of English-only signs was being obliterated with green paint by Society activists. Here are the first verse and chorus:

*Ffarwél i blygu glin
A llyfu tin y Sais,
Ffarwél daeogrwydd blin,
Fe waeddwn ag un llais;*

*Cytgan:
I'r caeau awn â'n cân
A bloeddiwn yn y ffyrdd,
Rhown Gymru oll ar dân
A pheintio'r byd yn wyrdd.*

*Cawn beintio'r byd yn wyrdd, hogia,
Peintio'r byd yn wyrdd;
Rhown Gymru oll ar dân, hogia,
A pheintio'r byd yn wyrdd.
© Cyhoeddiadau Sain*

[Farewell to bending the knee
And licking the arse of the English,
Farewell to vile serfdom,
We shout with united voice;

Chorus
We'll take our song to the fields
And we'll shout in the streets,
Let's set all Wales alight
And paint the world green.
We'll paint the world green, friends,
Paint the world green;
Let's set all Wales alight, friends,
And paint the world green.]

A Left-libertarian businessman

Dafydd Iwan sang professionally until 1974, which freed him to devote considerable time to the Welsh Language Society and its campaigns. Since then his energies have been channelled in three main directions, not to mention family responsibilities (although, as Dafydd Iwan himself has emphasised, his wide-ranging activities are all facets of 'the same cultural project'): [\[42\]](#)

(a) Utilizing his qualifications as an architect, he has been heavily involved in a housing association, Cymdeithas Tai Gwynedd ('The Gwynedd Housing Association'), founded in 1971, together with other housing projects, all dedicated to providing reasonably-priced homes for the local population in north-west Wales. The need for such provision stems from the fact that the housing market in that area has for many years been artificially inflated by purchasers from wealthier areas, mainly from over the border in England. This, together with the weak local economy and a paucity of job opportunities, has led to younger people leaving the area in significant numbers, with the resultant erosion of the Welsh language and culture in one of its heartlands.

(b) The 1970s witnessed a transition in the focus of Dafydd Iwan's political activities from the direct-action pressure-group politics of the Welsh Language Society to the more conventional party politics of Plaid Cymru. This is by no means an uncommon transition, since many Plaid Cymru activists over the years

have initially cut their political teeth in Welsh Language Society campaigns. [\[43\]](#) Dafydd Iwan has been both Chairman and Vice-President of Plaid Cymru, has contested both Westminster and European parliamentary seats on behalf of the party, has served as a prominent councillor on the Plaid-Cymru-controlled Gwynedd County Council, and was elected Plaid Cymru's President in 2003.

(c) In 1969 Dafydd Iwan co-founded the record company, Sain (= 'Sound'), of which he is still a director. The company is the main producer of commercial cassettes, videos and CDs in Welsh and has played a key role in developing and professionalizing the world of Welsh-language entertainment in general, and popular songs in particular. These include Dafydd Iwan's own songs, which have from the 1970s become increasingly professional in their accompaniment and arrangements. [\[44\]](#)

In many ways, then, the 'rebel' of the 1960s and early 1970s has come to play an increasingly 'establishment' role in Welsh political and cultural life. It should be emphasised that one of the most significant elements in this later period has been his entrepreneurial work as a businessman. In modern times (as has already been noted), Welsh cultural leaders have tended to come from the professional classes, the teacher/preacher class of Dafydd Iwan's parents, with those from the field of finance and business being few and far between. Furthermore, much of Welsh economic life has been steered and developed by people from outside Wales. But in the case of Dafydd Iwan and others of his generation we see perhaps the first conscious attempts — albeit 'in those fields where business and culture intersect', such as printing and publishing, record production and crafts [\[45\]](#) — to create Welsh-medium businesses in the traditional heartlands of the language, providing work for local people. [\[46\]](#) However, although he has diversified into other areas since the 1970s, Dafydd Iwan has continued writing and performing songs, despite announcing his 'retirement' on more than one occasion. Indeed, he is probably as popular an entertainer now as ever, drawing an enthusiastic following from a wide cross-section of all age-groups in the Welsh-language community.

It would be misleading, however, to give the impression that the Welsh political scene and the fate of the Welsh language are the subject-matter of all of Dafydd Iwan's songs. A prominent characteristic of his repertoire over the years has been its variety. His output includes children's songs (both original and new arrangements or adaptations of traditional material), love songs, songs in praise of nature, songs for use in Welsh learners' activities, together with some directly religious songs (carols in particular). Songs of social justice form a significant element in his repertoire. They reflect Dafydd Iwan's left-libertarianism, a product in part of his Nonconformist upbringing. [\[47\]](#) Some of these songs address matters of social concern in Wales itself, with attacks on Thatcherism and support for the peace movement being especially prominent. However, there is also a strong international flavour, and one can find in the repertoire a song in memory of Victor Jara (the singer-songwriter killed during the military coup which brought General Pinochet to power in Chile in 1973), and another on the plight of the Australian aborigines, while others focus on Vietnam, Nelson Mandela and apartheid, Greek democracy, the Gulf War, the Tiananmen Square protest, the assassination of Oscar Romero, and famine in Ethiopia. But as has

already been emphasised, it is his concern for the Welsh language and its culture, and for Welsh political self-determination, that has above all else shaped his song output.[\[48\]](#)

As regards the words, the great majority of Dafydd Iwan's songs are original Welsh compositions, with very few translations among them. This conforms with the emphasis in the closing paragraph of his contribution to the third volume in the series *Artists in Wales*, that

in the field of entertainment, as in any other...essentially our task is to find our own voice, and to stand on our own two feet. The Welsh language is essential to this independence. And an independent Wales, speaking its own tongue in its own voice, imitating no-one, is the Wales I have been singing about these past few years.[\[49\]](#)

However, when it comes to the tunes, there is a certain irony in the phrase 'imitating no-one', since a number of Dafydd Iwan's tunes are borrowings from outside Wales. His Welsh-only policy as regards lyrics has no equivalent when it comes to his music! His aim has always been to use simple, 'catchy' melodies, 'often with a refrain in which the audience can join',[\[50\]](#) and to that end he has been quite eclectic in his borrowings. A further irony is, that despite having little good to say of the United States of America — he has described it as 'gwlad wallgo, gyffrous ac afreal...[ac ynddi ond] ffin denau...rhwng ffaith a ffantasi' ('a mad, exciting and unreal country...with only a thin line...between fact and fantasy')[\[51\]](#) — the main musical influences on him, as he readily acknowledges, are American. This is particularly true of his earlier period, when he was heavily indebted to the collections of Burl Ives and Woody Guthrie. Pete Seeger and Joan Baez were also among the singers whose work he adapted into Welsh in this early period.[\[52\]](#) Indeed, six of the eight songs he recorded on his first two records were adaptations of American 'folk' songs.[\[53\]](#) In Dafydd Iwan, then, we see on the one hand an emphasis on Welshness and the worth of traditional Welsh culture, and on the other, a utilization of popular contemporary Anglo-American influences to revitalize and modernize that Welsh culture. In other words, one sees tradition and innovation interacting at the most complex of levels, with his songs serving a double counter-cultural role, aimed both at limiting and increasing external popular cultural influences.[\[54\]](#)

Folk revivals

Students of folk song identify two folk revivals in England in the twentieth century. The 'first' English folk revival, encapsulated in the Folk-Song Society, founded in 1898 (and later to merge into the English Folk Dance and Song Society), was driven by patriotism, romanticism and antiquarianism. This 'first' revival was soon to lose momentum. To quote David Atkinson:

Folk song collecting began in earnest in England in the late nineteenth century but declined significantly after the outbreak of the First World War, and the flowering of interest in the first decade of the twentieth

century could not be said to have established itself as a truly popular cultural movement.[\[55\]](#)

This is in stark contrast with the 'second' English folk revival, which began after the end of the Second World War and was inspired in part by its forerunner in America, which was associated with the likes of Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie, and rooted in the Great Depression of the 1930s. This 'second' English revival, like the first, was 'concerned with exploring origins and roots',[\[56\]](#) but was quite different in character from its predecessor and much more complex.[\[57\]](#) As with the American folk-song revival, it was more overtly political, with radical social issues to the fore; and in contrast with the 'first' English revival, it

can reasonably be described as a popular cultural phenomenon, which...provided new opportunities for people to experience music as participants and creators rather than primarily as consumers [and which] through the medium of folk clubs and festivals...achieved a degree of wide-scale popular participation.[\[58\]](#)

What of the situation in Wales in the same period? Because of their geographical proximity and the centuries of close interfacing, there are many similarities between the cultures of England and Wales; but there are also many significant differences. Wales is not part of England, and neither is Welsh-medium cultural life merely a translated version or a regional variant of its English counterpart. Even within Wales there are substantial differences between Welsh-medium and English-medium cultural life, with English-medium culture being generally more parochial in outlook and, understandably, more open to influences from England and America.

In the same way that England tends to be a step behind America, so intellectual movements tend to be later and weaker arriving in Wales than in England, with the result that they often vary significantly in their impact and development, and acquire a special Welsh 'flavour'. This can be seen in the case of the 'first' English folk revival. There is a parallel Welsh folk-song revival, which also reaches a crescendo prior to the First World War before going into significant decline. In origin and character, the English and Welsh movements were similar in many respects, and there was regular contact between prominent members of both movements, as is indicated for example by the frequency with which the names of prominent members of the English folk-song movement, such as Cecil Sharp, Lucy Broadwood and Annie Gilchrist, occur on the pages of the *Journal of the Welsh Folk-Song Society* and in the correspondence of members of the Welsh movement (preserved mainly in the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth and the National History Museum at St Fagans, Cardiff). Yet there were differences both in origins and development, with the Welsh movement being later in gaining momentum, as indicated by the fact that the Welsh Folk-Song Society was founded in the period 1906-08, a decade after its English counterpart.[\[59\]](#)

In the case of the 'second' English folk revival, comparisons with Wales are more difficult, partly because of the lack of detailed research and partly because of the wider variety of cultural influences and developments involved and the wider

range of participation and perceptions.[\[60\]](#) However, it would seem that, in general terms, the 'second' English and Welsh revivals developed in similar fashion, but with the Welsh movement again following about ten years after its English counterpart. In brief and over-simplified terms, the 'second' English folk revival developed between the 1950s and the 1970s from initial American influences to a greater emphasis on native traditions, and from being a less commercial and more amateur scene, with a prominent place for pressure politics and protest songs, to a greater professionalism and commercialism, with increased influence from rock music and electronic equipment.[\[61\]](#) Despite flutterings here and there, it would be difficult to use the label 'folk revival' in a Welsh-language context in the immediate post-war period. However, on reaching the 1960s that term is not wholly inappropriate, although it is difficult to distinguish a 'folk revival' in isolation from a general flourishing of Welsh pop music during that period. To that extent, it is perhaps best to reserve the term for the late 1970s and early 1980s, a period which saw a significant proliferation of folk groups and folk clubs and festivals in Wales, as reflected in the international success of the folk band, Ar Log ('On Rent'), formed in 1976,[\[62\]](#) the establishment of the bilingual *Taplas: A Folk Magazine for Wales* in early 1982, and the founding of the popular Gwyl Werin y Cnapan ('The *Cnapan* [or Hurling] Folk Festival') in rural west Wales in 1985, a festival in which Dafydd Iwan played a key role. 'By today — after a lengthy time-lag — Wales has been penetrated by the phenomena of folk club and *non-competitive folk festival*,' wrote D. Roy Saer in 1983.[\[63\]](#) However, those phenomena were to show signs of flagging as the 1980s progressed,[\[64\]](#) a period which saw, conversely, significant growth in the Welsh rock scene.

The development of this 'second' Welsh folk revival during the 1960s-1980s proceeded along not dissimilar lines to that of the 'second' English folk revival during the 1950s-1970s. We can see this in the case of Dafydd Iwan. As has already been noted, he began singing in the 1960s under strong American influences and in the context of protest movements, becoming more professional and electronic in his delivery as the 1970s progressed; and in the same way as the English revival came to place greater emphasis on native traditions, so in the case of Dafydd Iwan, the Irish and Celtic influences increase as time goes by — as seen, for example, in his translation of 'The Four Green Fields' by Tommy Makem. This mix of folk music, professionalism and 'celticism' reached a climax in the highly successful tours Dafydd Iwan made with the folk band Ar Log in 1982 and 1983. The following years were to be a low point in his singing career, which revitalized at the end of the 1980s with the formation of a backing band, and one sees his live performances in the 1990s tending more towards rock than folk, and proving extremely popular, especially with a new younger generation of fans.[\[65\]](#)

Despite the strong American influences on the 'second' English and Welsh folk revivals, it is important to remember that there was also an anti-American element present in both those revivals from their earliest stages. Both revivals were concerned to varying degrees with the preservation and promotion of traditional indigenous music and song in the context of increasing globalization, and of increasing American cultural influences in particular — the 'American juggernaut', as it has been graphically described by Frankie Armstrong and Brian

Pearson.[\[66\]](#) Certainly, the 'second' Welsh folk revival (like the 'first' Welsh folk revival at the beginning of the twentieth century) must be placed in the context of a wider national awakening in Wales, the desire to promote a body of 'national music' (and dance) as an expression of Welsh identity, and concerns regarding the erosion of traditional Welsh culture.

The 'second' English folk revival was to spawn tensions between 'purists' and 'innovators'.[\[67\]](#) On the Welsh folk-song scene in the 1960s and 1970s, there were those purists who frowned on any attempt to wed 'tradition' with contemporary popular youth culture.[\[68\]](#) Dafydd Iwan was certainly not of their number! Not that he disapproves of traditional Welsh folk songs. On the contrary, one finds him boasting of the wealth of folk material that is to be found in Welsh, and emphasising the importance of preserving and repopularizing such material. Indeed, at one level, many of his songs reflect a romantic harking after the type of rural, Welsh-speaking peasant communities from which so many traditional folk songs grew. All this is not surprising, since (as has already been suggested) the preservation and revival of folk songs and folk traditions and the preservation and promotion of national and community identity are frequent bed-fellows world-wide. However, as regards folk song, Dafydd Iwan is essentially a 'popularist' and an 'innovator'. His definition of folk song is wide, hinging on popularity and the ability to communicate to a contemporary audience. He emphasises the bond of communication between singer and listener as the defining factor, and can talk of 'traditional and contemporary' folk songs and of creating new folk songs.[\[69\]](#) 'All genuine folk songs...', he says, 'exist and survive because people want to sing them and people want to listen to them being sung. When they cease to be sung, they cease to exist.'[\[70\]](#)

He also places emphasis on the informality and 'naturalness' that characterize true folk-song performance. It is not surprising, therefore, to see him critical of the folk-song competitions which feature prominently in *eisteddfodau*. Just as part of the legacy of the 'first' English folk revival was the introduction of folk song to the school curriculum, albeit in highly edited versions,[\[71\]](#) so part of the legacy of its counterpart in Wales was to secure a place for folk song not only in the schools of Wales, but also in *eisteddfodau* of all shapes and sizes. Dafydd Iwan is full of praise for the role of *eisteddfodau* in nurturing the high-quality amateur activity that characterises the arts in Welsh-speaking Wales.[\[72\]](#) However, considering his emphasis on the informality, the spontaneity and the 'naturalness' of the genuine folk-song performance, it is not surprising to find him less than happy with folk songs being performed in the more contrived and competitive atmosphere of the *eisteddfod* stage.[\[73\]](#) Indeed, one may go further and suggest that part of Dafydd Iwan's contribution as a 'popularist' and an 'enabler' has been to help the Welsh folk song break out of the more formal settings of classroom and *eisteddfod*. However, while encouraging others to repopularize traditional material, traditional Welsh folk songs have formed only a small portion of his own repertoire. His role has been very much that of an 'innovator', creating new folk songs for a contemporary Wales. This again reflects his mission (like that of Saunders Lewis before him) of creating a modern, vibrant Wales, as can be seen in this reply to the question why he has chosen to sing only through the medium of Welsh:

The 38-year campaign of Cymdeithas yr Iaith has been conducted largely through the medium of the Welsh language itself. The world is not aware of it, but it has certainly worked in Wales. For the people we really had to change their attitudes were, first and foremost, the Welsh speakers themselves. Singers (and artists using other media) such as myself used Welsh as our language because it was the natural thing to do. The fact that we only used Welsh was part of our message, that *yr iaith Gymraeg* [the Welsh language] had an existence, and a dynamic, of its own. The medium was the message, in a very real and practical sense. Before the 60s, Welsh was the language of history, and of all things dying and decaying. We had to make it the language of the future, of youth, and of all things modern. [\[74\]](#)

As he says in one of his songs: 'Nid yw Cymru'n amgueddfa eto' ('Wales is not yet a museum').

One of the features of the Welsh Language Society throughout the decades of its existence has been its policy of promoting a popular youth culture through the medium of Welsh. Ned Thomas, writing in 1971, talks of the Welsh pop movement and the Welsh Language Society combining 'a new gaiety and lightness of touch' with the tradition of sacrifice and deep commitment of an older generation of Welsh nationalists, [\[75\]](#) while Richard Wyn Jones in a recent article in the Welsh-language literary journal, *Taliesin*, has emphasised the fact that the existence of a flourishing popular youth culture through the medium of Welsh over the past decades makes Wales almost unique among the stateless nations of Europe. The fact that it is located under the very nose of the powerful Anglo-American culture, which has proved so enticing and dynamic world-wide, makes its existence all the more remarkable. [\[76\]](#) Much of the thanks for this must be laid at the feet of the Welsh Language Society, and of Dafydd Iwan in particular.

Balladeer and spin-doctor

Dafydd Iwan would readily admit to not being the most accomplished of musicians. He would also admit to not being the most accomplished of poets, despite his conviction of the primacy of words over music in his songs. 'They lack the polish of poetry' is his own verdict on his lyrics. [\[77\]](#) In order to achieve the necessary immediacy, the lyrics of the pop song, like those of the street ballad, need to be simpler and more direct in expression than other forms of poetry; [\[78\]](#) and with words as with tunes, Dafydd Iwan certainly puts great emphasis on being simple and direct in style, often addressing his audience in the second person. He also puts great emphasis on the marriage of words and music, and on the performance itself, for above all Dafydd Iwan is a communicator, only really happy when performing before a live audience. [\[79\]](#) He is a charismatic performer, and much of his success lies in the way he combines, both in his songs and in his performance of them, a light-hearted, humorous touch with the conviction that he is, at the same time, deadly serious, speaking with integrity and in earnest. [\[80\]](#) Dafydd Iwan may not be a great poet or musician, but the sum of his overall performance is greater than the parts,

and he is without doubt one of the great communicators of contemporary Wales.

Since the early 1980s, Dafydd Iwan has regularly filled Nonconformist chapel pulpits as a lay preacher. He is very much a 'social preacher', reflecting in his sermons the 'social justice' themes that are so prominent in his songs.[\[81\]](#) Indeed, it is not inappropriate to deem his songs as sermons of a sort; and his 'sermons in song' have certainly proved more effective than many a pulpit sermon! As one commentator has put it, 'Hwyrach mai pregethwr, ac nid cerddor, yw e, ond yn ei gatecismau newidiodd hanes Cymru' ('He may be a preacher rather than a musician, but in his catechisms he changed the history of Wales').[\[82\]](#)

Part of his effectiveness has been the simple, direct nature of his message and its delivery. As with all movements, the nationalist movement in Wales over the past forty years has had its tensions, its conflicting priorities and ideologies, its sectarian elements. None of these is reflected in Dafydd Iwan's lyrics. In content, his songs present the basic tenets of the nationalist movement in straightforward, uncomplicated terms, and as a matter of supreme common sense and undisputable fact. 'Dim ond ffwl sydd yn gofyn pam fod eira yn wyn' ('Only a fool asks why snow is white'), he says, in the refrain of one of his best-known songs.[\[83\]](#) And, as has already been suggested, this simplicity and directness extend to the style and presentation of his songs as well as their content. There is no room for the experimental or the esoteric in words, music or stance. Although Dafydd Iwan has often been portrayed as a 'rebel', especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s, even in that period, both as a political activist and as an artist (and even in terms of dress!), it is more correct to regard him as a 'modernizer' than a 'revolutionary'. His is not the path of the hippie or the drop-out. In political terms, he has always worked within the constitutional framework to create a popular, inclusive nationalist movement; and culturally and musically his aim has been to promote inclusiveness and variety in taste and style (both folk and rock, for example), and to revitalize and modernize traditional Welsh culture, working within the tradition rather than supplanting it.

In his wide, conventional, popular appeal, and simplicity of message and style, one can see great similarities between Dafydd Iwan and the old street-ballad singers. A further similarity is that both Dafydd Iwan and the old ballad singers are storytellers in song. Much of the raw material of Dafydd Iwan's songs, and the stimuli for their composition, are specific events and situations. One may go further. Every society, movement, nation needs its stories, its myths, its heroes, be they real or imagined; and Dafydd Iwan's songs have contributed substantially to meeting that need in contemporary Wales, and within the nationalist movement in particular. His songs weave romances, turning contemporary events and individuals into sagas and living legends, and creating a tapestry which locates the current struggle for the survival of Welsh language, culture and identity in a wider historical and international context.

Even today, the school curriculum in Wales is very Anglo-centric, with little attention (if any) paid to Welsh history. The same is true of much of the press and media in Wales, who have often been dismissive of the Welsh nationalist cause, if not positively antagonistic. In such circumstances, Dafydd Iwan's songs

have performed a significant role, not only in putting a nationalist spin on current affairs, but also in promoting a consciousness of Welsh history and of folk heroes from the nation's past. In other words, Dafydd Iwan is spin-doctor, educator and ballad singer rolled into one. Through his songs, many have been introduced for the very first time to people and places and events significant in the struggle for Welsh survival, past and present.

The nationalist movement of twentieth century Wales grew in part out of a romantic patriotic awakening in the late nineteenth century. One of the characteristics of that awakening was a conscious effort to promote Welsh history, to rewrite it from a patriotic Welsh standpoint and to create a gallery of folk heroes. (It is no accident that the Welsh Folk-Song Society was founded in the period 1906-08, since it was a part of that awakening, as was the National Museum of Wales and the National Library of Wales, both founded in 1907.) [84] The village of Llanuwchllyn, near Bala, where Dafydd Iwan spent his teenage years, was home to some of the most significant figures in the national awakening of the late nineteenth century. Their shadow still falls strongly over that village, not least the shadow of that most influential of romantic patriotic historians, O. M. Edwards (1858-1920). Dafydd Iwan's approach to Welsh history, and his enthusiastic promotion of it, resemble that of O. M. Edwards and may be seen as a continuation of his efforts. 'Remember' was a key word in the vocabulary of O. M. Edwards, and it is a prominent verb in the songs of Dafydd Iwan.

Two further points should be emphasised regarding Dafydd Iwan's work. Although his songs are characterized by passion and deadly seriousness, they are at the same time shot through with humour. One commentator talks of Dafydd Iwan gift 'o drosglwyddo hapusrwydd sy'n denu cynulleidfaoedd' ('of transferring a happiness which attracts audiences'). [85] And twinned with humour is its converse, satire — not a dark, sinister and sarcastic ridiculing, but a satire light-hearted in touch, which stings with a twinkle in the eye.

The other overwhelming characteristic of Dafydd Iwan's work is its optimism. [86] In the chorus of an early song, written in 1966, he says, after the fashion of the old Welsh prophetic-patriotic poetry of the Middle Ages:

*O rwy'n gweld, rwy'n gweld y dydd
Bydd Cymru yn Gymru rydd
A phawb o fewn ein gwlad yn siarad Cymraeg
© Cyhoeddiadau Sain*

[Oh I see, I see the day
When Wales will be a free Wales
And everyone in our country will speak Welsh.]

One of the folk-heroes named in that early song is Owain Glyndwr, leader of the last major uprising against English rule in the early fifteenth century. He came to the forefront of Welsh consciousness as a folk hero during the patriotic

awakening at the end of the nineteenth century.^[87] An important reason for his prominence as a folk hero is that he was never killed or captured by the English; rather he disappeared, leaving behind the belief that he would one day return as a national redeemer-hero — which is, of course, a common international folk motif. Given Dafydd Iwan's optimistic stance, it is not surprising to see him not only naming Glyndwr in a number of songs, but dedicating a whole song to the sure hope of his return.^[88] Here is the last verse of that song, written in 1969, whose final line comes from an old prophetic poem promising his return in a time of great need:

*Rhown heibio bob anobaith,
A'r holl amheuon lu,
Mae Owain eto'n barod am y dydd.
O'i loches yn Eryri,
Fe ddaw â'i ffyddlon lu
I'n harwain gyda'r wawr i Gymru rydd.
Myn Duw, mi a wn y daw.
© Cyhoeddiadau Sain*

[Let us put aside every despair
And the whole host of doubts,
Owain is again ready for the day.
From his refuge in Snowdonia,
He will come with his faithful host
To lead us with the dawn to a free Wales.
By God, I know he will come.
(*trans. Elissa R. Henken*)]

Dafydd Iwan's optimism is nowhere clearer to be seen than in what is arguably his most popular song, 'Yma o Hyd' ('Still Here'). Written in 1983 at the request of the pioneer Welsh nationalist Member of Parliament, Gwynfor Evans (1912-2005),^[89] another charismatic leader of twentieth-century Welsh nationalism, this song was composed at a low point in nationalist morale. A limited measure of devolution of government from Westminster to Wales had been overwhelmingly rejected by the Welsh electorate in a referendum in 1979. Later that year the centralist Conservative government of the Iron Lady, Margaret Thatcher, was elected to Westminster; and as if timed to rub salt into the wounds of nationalists, 1982 saw the 700th anniversary of the death of the last native Welsh prince. Yet in spite of everything, says Dafydd Iwan in 'Yma o Hyd', despite even Margaret Thatcher and her side-kicks, the Welsh have been here since the Romans left Wales in ad 383, 1600 years ago, and we will be here until Judgement Day! Poetic licence, perhaps, but it is certainly stirring stuff that played not an insignificant role in morale-raising in nationalist circles in Wales, which in turn contributed (amongst other things) to the passing of a notable 'trio of acts in the decade 1988-98',^[90] namely the Education Reform Act of 1988, which gave Wales its own National Curriculum and afforded an enhanced position to the Welsh language in schools; the Welsh Language Act of 1993, which provided a statutory framework for the treatment of Welsh and English on

the basis of equality; and the Government of Wales Act of 1998, which authorized the establishment of a National Assembly for Wales in 1999, subject to a (this time successful) referendum.

Here, then, in closing is an English version of perhaps Dafydd Iwan's most influential song:

You don't remember Macsen.
Who was he? You don't know?
One thousand and six hundred years
Is far, far too long ago.
When Magnus Maximus left Wales
Three eighty three was the year;
He left us as a whole nation
And today — look, we're still here!

Chorus:

We're still here today! We're still here today!
Despite everything and everybody
We're still here today!

Let the wind blow from the east,
Let the storm from the sea roar,
Let the sky split with lightening,
Let thunderbolts shout encore;
Let the fainthearted keep wailing,
Let the serfs grovel and fawn;
In spite of the darkness around us
We're ready to greet a new dawn.

Remember that old Prince Macsen
Left our country as one;
Let's shout out to all the nations,
'We'll be here until Kingdom come!'
Despite all the collaborators,
Despite Maggie's gang, we're alive,
We'll be here for ever and ever,
The Welsh language will survive!

(trans. Geraint Løvgreen)

© *Cyhoeddiadau Sain*

The establishment of the National Assembly heralds a new dawn in Welsh politics, and we have yet to see how it will influence Dafydd Iwan's development

as a singer and politician. Having performed regularly throughout the length and breadth of the country for almost forty years, he has decided to reduce his singing commitments drastically in the new millennium, saying that he regards Dafydd Iwan the singer as a phenomenon of the twentieth century; [91] but even in 'semi-retirement' as a singer, he remains a popular entertainer and an icon of Welsh cultural life.

Within Welsh-speaking Wales, Dafydd Iwan has achieved the status of a folk hero. He has undoubtedly helped change the course of Welsh history. His songs are an integral part of contemporary Welsh life, and are to be heard regularly in concerts, on television and radio, not to mention more informal settings. However, Dafydd Iwan is not well-known outside Wales, and Welsh-speaking Wales in particular. This is due in part to his decision to sing only in Welsh, and in part to the specific Welsh nature of much of the content of his songs. He has performed outside Wales on many occasions — in other Celtic countries, to the Welsh diaspora in America, and in minority-language contexts in mainland Europe. But he is little known in wider circles, and very few of his songs have been translated into other languages, or adopted and adapted by other singers in different cultural settings. This is not to say, however, that Dafydd Iwan is not of international significance. For, despite the lack of international profile, he is very much an international phenomenon, as an embodiment in a specific cultural context of the singer-songwriter par excellence and as a concrete example of the power and influence of popular song.

Notes

I wish to thank Dr David Atkinson, and my colleague in the School of Welsh at Cardiff University, Professor Colin H. Williams, for reading an earlier version of this article and for their valuable comments, and to thank the editorial board of the Folk Music Journal for their helpful suggestions. Thanks are also due to Dafydd Iwan for reading the penultimate version of the article, for his comments and co-operation, and for permission to quote from his songs.

The article was completed prior to my consulting Sarah Hill's important unpublished doctoral thesis, ' "Blerwytirhwng?": Welsh Popular Music, Language, and the Politics of Identity' (University of Wales [Cardiff], 2002). The thesis explores the cultural development of Welsh-language popular music since 1945 in its social, political and linguistic context, and with special reference to its relationship with Anglo-American popular music, and although not cited in the present article, is highly recommended for further study. It includes a case-study of Dafydd Iwan and a useful time-line of popular music which juxtaposes Welsh and Anglo-American developments. It is available on microfilm from the British Library Document Supply Centre, ref. DX218514.

A discography from 1966 to 1992 is to be found in the collection of Dafydd Iwan's songs, *Holl Ganeuon Dafydd Iwan* (Tal-y-bont: Y Lolfa, 1992). A discography of more recent material is to be found on the website of his recording company, [Sain](#).

- [1] Alan Butt Philip, *The Welsh Question: Nationalism in Welsh Politics 1945-1970* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975), chapter 5; cf. Phil Williams, 'Plaid Cymru a'r Dyfodol', in *Cymru'n Deffro: Hanes y Blaid Genedlaethol 1925-75*, ed. John Davies (Tal-y-bont: Y Lolfa, 1981), pp. 121-146 (pp. 122-39).
- [2] Hefin Wyn, *Be Bop a Lula'r Delyn Aur: Hanes Canu Poblogaidd Cymraeg* (Tal-y-bont: Y Lolfa, 2002), p. 13.
- [3] Dafydd Iwan, *Cân dros Gymru* (Caernarfon: Gwasg Gwynedd, 2002), p. 26.
- [4] Colin H. Williams, 'Restoring the Language', in *'Let's Do Our Best for the Ancient Tongue': The Welsh Language in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Geraint H. Jenkins and Mari A. Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 657-81 (p. 660); Ned Thomas, *The Welsh Extremist*, 2nd edn (Tal-y-bont: Y Lolfa, 1973), pp. 17, 21; Butt Philip, pp. 91, 93-5; Pwyll ap Siôn, ' "Yn y Fro": Mudiad Adfer and Welsh Popular Song during the 1970s', *Welsh Music History*, 5 (2002), 190-216.
- [5] John Aitchison and Harold Carter, *A Geography of the Welsh Language 1961-1991* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), pp. 32-55; Dylan Phillips, *Trwy Ddulliau Chwyldro...? Hanes Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg, 1962-1992* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1998), p. 14.
- [6] E. Wyn James, ' "The New Birth of a People": Welsh Language and Identity and the Welsh Methodists, c.1740-1820', in *Religion and National Identity: Wales and Scotland c.1700-2000*, ed. Robert Pope (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 14-42 (p. 17).
- [7] Dafydd Iwan, 'Dafydd Iwan', in *Artists in Wales 3*, ed. Meic Stephens (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1977), pp. 38-44 (p. 40).
- [8] Saunders Lewis, 'The Fate of the Language', trans. G. Aled Williams, in *Presenting Saunders Lewis*, ed. Alun R. Jones and Gwyn Thomas, 2nd edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1983), pp. 127-41 (p. 141).
- [9] Cynog Davies, 'Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg', *The Welsh Language Today*, ed. Meic Stephens (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1973), pp. 248-63 (pp. 248-50); Colin H. Williams, 'Restoring the Language', pp. 666-9.
- [10] Alan Llwyd, *Barddoniaeth y Chwedegau: Astudiaeth Lenyddol-Hanesyddol* ([n.p.]: Cyhoeddiadau Barddas, 1986), p. 80.
- [11] Dafydd Glyn Jones, 'His Politics', in *Presenting Saunders Lewis*, ed. Alun R. Jones and Gwyn Thomas, 2nd edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1983), pp. 23-78 (p. 78).
- [12] Roger Wallis and Krister Malm, 'Sain Cymru: The Role of the Welsh Phonographic Industry in the Development of a Welsh Language Pop/Rock/Folk Scene', *Popular Music*, 3 (1984), 77-105 (p. 85); cf. Pwyll ap Siôn, ' "Yn y Fro" ',

pp. 190-4.

[13] Dafydd Iwan, *Artists in Wales 3*, p. 40; Dafydd Iwan, *Dafydd Iwan*, ed. Manon Rhys, 'Cyfres y Cewri' Series, 1 (Caernarfon: Gwasg Gwynedd, 1981), pp. 48-9.

[14] Dafydd Iwan, *Artists in Wales 3*, p. 40.

[15] Ned Thomas, pp. 92, 94.

[16] Simon Brooks, 'Dafydd Iwan yn y Glaw', *Barn*, 481 (2003), 42-5 (pp. 42, 44).

[17] Wyn, pp. 71-2, 389.

[18] See Butt Philip, pp. 212-20; Dafydd Glyn Jones, 'The Welsh Language Movement', in *The Welsh Language Today*, ed. Meic Stephens (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1973), pp. 264-318. (pp. 286-8).

[19] *Dafydd Iwan*, ed. Manon Rhys, pp. 34-5; Dafydd Iwan, *Cân dros Gymru*, pp. 21-2.

[20] Wallis and Malm, p. 85.

[21] Butt Philip, pp. 198-9.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 247.

[23] Although they have not always been particularly helpful! See, for example, Julia C. Bishop, ' "Dr Carpenter from the Harvard College in America": An Introduction to James Madison Carpenter and his Collection', *Folk Music Journal*, 7:4 (1998), 402-20 (pp. 405-6).

[24] *Dafydd Iwan*, ed. Manon Rhys, pp. 9, 23; cf. Dafydd Iwan, 'Political Troubadour: Dafydd Iwan Interviewed by Damian Walford Davies', *Planet*, 150 (2001-02), 19-27 (pp. 20-1).

[25] *Dafydd Iwan*, ed. Manon Rhys, p. 30.

[26] Phillips, p. 20.

[27] Ned Thomas, p. 90; Cynog Davies, p. 261.

[28] Meic Llewellyn, 'Welsh — The Language of Rock!', *Planet*, 129 (1998), 56-64 (p. 57).

[29] Dafydd Iwan, *Cân dros Gymru*, p. 150.

[30] Dafydd Iwan, 'Political Troubadour', p. 21.

[31] Dafydd Iwan, 'Political Troubadour', p. 26; cf. Pwyll ap Siôn, ' "Yn y Fro" ', pp. 191-2.

[32] W. Rhys Nicholas, *The Folk Poets, Writers of Wales Series* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1978), pp. 2, 53, 63; Dafydd Iwan, 'Political Troubadour', pp. 20, 27; cf. Niall MacKinnon, *The British Folk Scene: Musical Performance and Social Identity, Popular Music in Britain Series* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993), p. 11.

[33] Gwynfor Evans, *For the Sake of Wales*, trans. Meic Stephens ([Cardiff]: Welsh Academic Press, 1996), p. 194; E. Wyn James, ' "The New Birth of a People" ', p. 22.

[34] Dafydd Iwan, 'Political Troubadour', p. 22.

[35] On the older use of the term 'British' as synonymous with 'Welsh', see E. Wyn James, ' "The New Birth of a People" ', p. 22.

[36] Dafydd Iwan, *Artists in Wales 3*, p. 41; cf. Dafydd Iwan, 'Political Troubadour', pp. 22-3.

[37] Cynog Davies, pp. 258-9; Butt Philip, pp. 237-8.

[38] Ned Thomas, p. 88.

[39] An English translation of all four verses is to be found in Wallis and Malm, pp. 86-7.

[40] Gwynfor Evans, pp. 182-5.

[41] Dafydd Iwan, *Artists in Wales 3*, pp. 40-1; cf. Pwyll ap Siôn, ' "Yn y Fro" ', pp. 193-4.

[42] Quoted by Derec Llwyd Morgan in his address of presentation of Dafydd Iwan for admission to the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws of the University of Wales, 17 April 2004.

[43] Colin H. Williams, 'Non-Violence and the Development of the Welsh Language Society, 1962-c. 1974', *Welsh History Review*, 8:4 (1977), 426-55 (p. 454).

[44] Wallis and Malm, pp. 85, 88, 94-5; Wyn, chapter 9.

[45] Dafydd Glyn Jones, 'The Welsh Language Movement', pp. 302, 309-10.

[46] Dafydd Iwan, *Oriau gyda Dafydd Iwan: Llyfr Un* (Tal-y-bont: Y Lolfa, 1969), p. [12].

[47] Carwyn Fowler, *Analysing the Welsh Identity*, Welsh Governance Centre Working Paper, IV (Cardiff: Welsh Governance Centre, Cardiff University, 2001),

pp. 11-12; Dafydd Iwan, 'Political Troubadour', pp. 19-20.

[48] Dafydd Iwan, *Artists in Wales 3*, pp. 38, 42.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[51] *Dafydd Iwan*, ed. Manon Rhys, pp. 139, 140.

[52] *Dafydd Iwan*, ed. Manon Rhys, p. 35; Dafydd Iwan, *Holl Ganeuon Dafydd Iwan*, 2nd edn (Tal-y-bont: Y Lolfa, 1998), p. 5; Dafydd Iwan, 'Political Troubadour', p. 21.

[53] Dafydd Iwan, *Cân dros Gymru*, p. 35.

[54] Cf. Pwyll ap Siôn, ' "Yn y Fro" ', p. 202.

[55] David Atkinson, 'Folk Song Revival/Folk Song Tradition', in *Ballad and Ballad Studies at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Nicolae Constantinescu (Bucharest: Editura Deliana, 2001), pp. 11-20 (p. 11).

[56] MacKinnon, p. 22.

[57] See Frankie Armstrong and Brian Pearson, 'Some Reflections on the English Folk Revival', *History Workshop Journal*, 7 (1979), 95-100; Vic Gammon, 'One Hundred Years of the Folk-Song Society', in *Folk Song: Tradition, Revival, and Re-Creation*, ed. Ian Russell and David Atkinson (Aberdeen: The Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, 2004), pp. 14-27 (pp. 21-2, 25).

[58] Atkinson, 'Folk Song Revival/Folk Song Tradition', p. 11.

[59] D. Roy Saer, *Cymdeithas Alawon Gwerin Cymru: The Welsh Folk-Song Society 1908-1983* ([n.p.]: Welsh Folk-Song Society, 1985), pp. 8-12; see also E. Wyn James, 'An "English" Lady Among Welsh Folk: Ruth Herbert Lewis and the Welsh Folk-Song Society', in *Folk Song: Tradition, Revival, and Re-Creation*, ed. Ian Russell and David Atkinson (Aberdeen: The Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, 2004), pp. 266-83.

[60] Atkinson, 'Folk Song Revival/Folk Song Tradition', p. 11.

[61] MacKinnon, chapter 3; Atkinson, 'Folk Song Revival/Folk Song Tradition'; David Atkinson, 'Revival: Genuine or Spurious?', in *Folk Song: Tradition, Revival, and Re-Creation*, ed. Ian Russell and David Atkinson (Aberdeen: The Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, 2004), pp. 144-62 (pp. 152-4); cf. Pwyll ap Siôn, ' "Yn y Fro" '.

[62] Lyn Ebenezer, *Ar Log Ers Ugain Mlynedd* (Llanrwst: Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 1996), p. 6.

- [63] D. Roy Saer, *Cymdeithas Alawon Gwerin Cymru: The Welsh Folk-Song Society 1908-1983*, p. 18; cf. Wallis and Malm, p. 98; Wyn, chapters 15, 17 and 23.
- [64] Cf. Atkinson, 'Revival: Genuine or Spurious?', p. 154.
- [65] Dafydd Iwan, *Cân dros Gymru*, p. 172.
- [66] 'Some Reflections on the English Folk Revival', p. 96.
- [67] MacKinnon, chapter 3; Atkinson, 'Folk Song Revival/Folk Song Tradition'.
- [68] D. Roy Saer, *Canu at Iws* ([n.p.]: Cymdeithas Alawon Gwerin Cymru, 1992), pp. 24-5.
- [69] Dafydd Iwan, *Artists in Wales 3*, p. 39; Dafydd Iwan, 'Canu Gwerin: Canu'r Werin', *Lol*, 2 (1966), 29.
- [70] Dafydd Iwan, *Artists in Wales 3*, p. 39.
- [71] MacKinnon, p. 22.
- [72] Dafydd Iwan, *Artists in Wales 3*, p. 44.
- [73] Dafydd Iwan, 'Canu Gwerin: Canu'r Werin', p. 29; cf. D. Roy Saer, *Canu at Iws*, pp. 16-23; Stephen Rees, *Traddodiadau Cerdd Cymru* ([n.p.]: Cymdeithas Alawon Gwerin Cymru, 2000), pp. 8-10; Wyn, chapter 17.
- [74] Sandi Thomas, *You Don't Speak Welsh! The Pleasure and Pain of Learning Welsh* (Tal-y-bont: Y Lolfa, 2001), p. 47.
- [75] Ned Thomas, p. 94.
- [76] Richard Wyn Jones, 'Ysgrifennu Hanes Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg', *Taliesin*, 112 (2001), 107-24 (p. 108).
- [77] Dafydd Iwan, *Artists in Wales 3*, p. 39.
- [78] Damian Walford Davies, ' "Rewriting the Law-Books": The Poetry of Welsh Pop Music', *Welsh Music History*, 1 (1996), 206-40 (p. 207).
- [79] Dafydd Iwan, 'Canu Gwerin: Canu'r Werin', p. 29; Dafydd Iwan, *Artists in Wales 3*, pp. 38-9; *Holl Ganeuon Dafydd Iwan*, p. 5.
- [80] Ned Thomas, pp. 92, 94.
- [81] Dafydd Iwan, 'Political Troubadour', pp. 19-20, 23-4; Dafydd Iwan, *Cân dros Gymru*, pp. 116-17.
- [82] Brooks, p. 44.

[83] Brooks, pp. 42-5; Pwyll ap Siôn, 'Voices of Resistance: Geraint Jarman and the Roots of Reggae in Welsh Popular Music', *Welsh Music History*, 2 (1997), 263-77 (p. 267).

[84] See E. Wyn James, 'An "English" Lady Among Welsh Folk', pp. 267-8; cf. the patriotic stimulus behind the founding of the Folk-Song Society — see, for example, Vic Gammon, 'One Hundred Years of the Folk-Song Society', p. 25; Richard Sykes, 'The Evolution of Englishness in the English Folksong Revival, 1890-1914', *Folk Music Journal*, 6:4 (1993), pp. 446-90.

[85] Wyn, p. 353.

[86] Brooks, p. 45.

[87] E. Wyn James, ' "Nes Na'r Hanesydd...": Owain Glyndwr a Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg y Cyfnod Modern', *Taliesin*, 114 (2002), 116-25 (p. 116). On Glyndwr as a folk hero, see Elissa R. Henken, *National Redeemer: Owain Glyndwr in Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996). I discuss a possible reference to Glyndwr in a traditional Welsh folk stanza in my article, 'Ballad Implosions and Welsh Folk Stanzas', in *Ballad and Ballad Studies at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Nicolae Constantinescu (Bucharest: Editura Deliana, 2001), pp. 101-17 (pp. 111-12).

[88] Henken, *National Redeemer: Owain Glyndwr in Welsh Tradition*, pp. 147, 179-84.

[89] Gwynfor Evans, p. 201.

[90] Colin H. Williams, 'Restoring the Language', p. 675.

[91] Dafydd Iwan, *Cân dros Gymru*, p. 9.

- [Libraries](#)
 - [Locations](#)
 - [Libraries Listed by Subject](#)
 - [Using the Libraries](#)
 - [Library Contacts](#)
 - [Finding Books and Journals](#)
 - [Special Collections and Archives](#)
 - [Library Special Collections](#)
 - [Archives and Manuscript Collections](#)
 - [Digital Collections](#)
 - [Welsh Ballads](#)

- [Exhibition Images Online](#)
- [Ann Griffiths](#)
- [Contacts, Information and News](#)
 - [Services for Distance Learners](#)
 - [Using and Borrowing from Other Libraries](#)
 - [Access for Visitors](#)
 - [External Membership](#)
- [INSRV Home](#)
- [Libraries](#)
- [I.T.](#)
- [Electronic Resources](#)
- [Graphics and Media](#)
- [Education and Training](#)

• **EXPLORE CARDIFF UNIVERSITY**

- [HOME](#)
- [ABOUT](#)
- [EDUCATION](#)
- [RESEARCH](#)
- [NEWS](#)
- [EVENTS](#)
- [A-Z](#)



[Back to top](#)

- [© Cardiff University](#)
- [Accessibility](#)
- [Help](#)
- [Feedback](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Terms of Use](#)
- [A-Z](#)