



A Nation of Song

Gymanfa Ganu + Rhos & Treorchy Male Voice Choirs

Aberystwyth
Llef * Canon Lan
Cwm Rhondda
Bryn Calfaria
Sleepers Awake
Hiraeth * Crimond
Ar Doriad Dydd
Tydi A Roddaist
Hen Wlad Fy
Nhadru (Anthem)
& more!

Take: 2 alto

A Nation of Song

[1]	<i>Diadem</i>	4:02	[8]	<i>Builth</i>	3:02
[2]	<i>Trewen</i>	3:43	[9]	<i>Rachie</i>	3:36
[3]	<i>Aberystwyth</i>	3:11	[10]	<i>I Need Thee Every Hour</i>	4:18
[4]	<i>Llef (Cry)</i>	3:06	[11]	<i>Bryn Calfaria (Calvary Hill)</i>	2:19
[5]	<i>Calon Lan (Guileless Heart)</i>	3:29	[12]	<i>Rhyd y Groes</i>	5:28
[6]	<i>Sanctus</i>	4:19	[13]	<i>Crimond</i>	2:48
[7]	<i>Cwm Rhondda</i>	3:38			

Emyr Jones, reader

'Gymfada Ganu' 5000 Voices

Terry James, conductor • Cyril Anthony, organ

[14]	J.S. Bach: <i>Zion Hears the Watchmen Singing</i> (<i>Wachet auf</i> , BWV180)	5:03
[15]	<i>O Bone Jesu</i>	2:03
[16]	<i>A Russian Hymn</i>	2:28
[17]	<i>Come Let Us to the Lord Our God</i>	2:14

Treorchy Male Voice Choir

John Haydn Davies ([14]-[16]), John Cynan Jones([17]), conductors

D.J. Rees, organ

[18]	<i>Ave Verum</i>	3:43
[19]	<i>Ar Doriad Dydd (At Break of Day)</i>	2:20
[20]	<i>Myfanwy</i>	3:31
[21]	<i>Tydi A Roddaist (Thou Gavest)</i>	3:22
[22]	<i>Hiraeth (Exiles Longing)</i>	4:04
[23]	Franz Schubert: <i>Psalm 23</i>	6:26
[24]	<i>Hen Wlad Fy Nhadru</i> (Welsh National Anthem)	1:47

Rhos Male Voice Choir

Edward Jones, conductor • John Tudor Davies, organ

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Community singing has long been a cherished tradition in Wales, with roots stretching back centuries. One particularly ancient form, dating to the monastic era of the Middle Ages, still echoes today in some of the country's more remote villages. Known as the *Gymanfa Bwnc* (pronounced "Gum-an-va Boonk," meaning "community song"), this unique style involves small groups singing in a distinctive, chant-like manner. In the late 19th century, during the height of Welsh Nonconformity /Methodism - when religious devotion flourished alongside industrial prosperity - congregational singing became increasingly popular in the packed chapels across the country. It was during this period that

the 'Gymanfa Ganu' (Hymn-Singing Festival -pronounced "Gum-an-va Gaanee") idea emerged: a carefully prepared festival of large choirs all singing in harmony. This annual event quickly became a much-anticipated tradition, and the Religious Revival at the turn of the century gave it a powerful and uplifting boost.

Several factors led to the decline of the 'Gymanfa' in modern-day Wales. Social upheavals caused by two world wars, the economic hardships of the 1930s, and the steady depopulation of rural areas all played a role. However, on special occasions - particularly around Whitsun and Christmas - the chapels in many Welsh towns still come alive with the powerful sound of hymn singing, stirring a deep sense of nostalgia. And it's that very nostalgia that holds the key. It's what draws Welsh North Americans to their annual 'Gymanfa Ganus' in places like Canada, Chicago, or Cleveland, where they seek to reconnect with the harmonies of their homeland.

With heart and voice, this spontaneous assembly of Greater London's Welsh 'exiles' - clerks and clerics, policemen and politicians, lawyers and doctors, shopkeepers and City merchants, from all walks of life - recaptured the bygone fervour of the *Land of their Fathers*.

When the singing miners of the **Rhos Male Voice Choir** travelled to London to record at St. Mark's Church in St. John's Wood, some wore bandages. The night before, a minor accident had occurred at the colliery where they worked. Others bore scars from past injuries. But all of them carried the heavy weight of tragic memories of the Gresford pit disaster in 1934, which devastated their community. The disaster, which claimed 266 lives, shocked the nation. These men are the heirs to the sufferings and heroism that tragedy brought to their village. Among them are those who still mine coal where their fathers and brothers perished. Others come from nearby pits, such as Hafod and Bersham (all near Wrexham).

They are also the bearers of a rich musical tradition that has been nurtured for generations by miners in this North Wales district, with an astonishing sense of continuity. From this village have emerged not only some of the finest voices but also some of the most talented composers *the Land of Song* has ever known.

Rhosllannerchrugog, meaning 'the Heath of Heathery Moorland'—or simply Rhos—stands as a testament to the Industrial Revolution's reach into the Welsh Borderlands. With one of the longest names in the country, this sprawling village is also the largest in area, stretching over half a square mile, and is bordered to the east by Offa's Dyke. Despite its close proximity to England, the village's population of around 11,000 has remained predominantly Welsh-speaking. In this recording, the choir's selection of songs showcases the full spectrum of native Welsh talent.

Despite the refined artistry evident in pieces like the monastic *Ave Verum*, this performance is far from a detached reflection of emotion. It's a vibrant, living experience that invites the discerning listener to fully engage, also in *Myfanwy*,

the sorrow of unrequited love reaches a poignant depth. Here, indeed, is artistic talent marked by emotion and heritage and translated into song.

Nicola Sampson, 2025

It was on 21 December 1834 that Griffith Rhys Jones was born in the 'Rose and Crown' public house in Trecynon, near Aberdare in South Wales. In his early days, 'Griff y Crown' (Griff from the Crown) worked as a blacksmith, apprenticed to his father, and later was to become a highly successful businessman, making his money from several breweries. He had also learnt the violin as a child and, by then known as *Caradog*, became a highly respected choir trainer. In 1870 he bought the 'Treorky Hotel' in the Rhondda, and immediately set about forming a choir for men's voices.

So successful was he as a conductor that he twice led the South Wales Choral Union to victory in competitions at the Crystal Palace in London. In the early 1880s, at an impromptu eisteddfod at the 'Red Cow Hotel' in Treorchy, a group of young men from the town won a prize of £1 for their rendition of *Myfanwy* [20] by Joseph Parry. Encouraged by this, they formed themselves into what they called 'The Treorky Male Choir' and set about giving concerts at local hostelrys, notably at the 'Treorky Hotel' which became their home. By October 1883, the choir had won thirty shillings at another eisteddfod at the 'Corner House Hotel' in nearby Treherbert. In the spring of 1885, the choir invited William Thomas to be its conductor. Soon Thomas, who was a strict disciplinarian and teetotaler, had trained his sixty singers to such a standard that they were able to win the first prize of £5 at the Whitsun Eisteddfod at St Fagan's, the adjudicator being none other than *Caradog*. More prizes came their way, notably the Blue Riband at the Royal National Eisteddfod in 1889. In August 1895, the *Treorky singers* were invited to sing for the Duke of Cambridge at his estate near Edinburgh and, such was their success that they had to give three encores. A month later they sang for Lady Dunraven who, subsequently, secured an invitation for a Command Performance for Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle on 29 November 1895. It seems the Queen's interest in Welsh music dated from 1889 when she visited Merioneth.

In 1946 the present-day **Treorchy Male Choir** was created by John Haydn Davies who had been assistant conductor of its predecessor in 1938. He brought with him his friend, Tom Jones, as accompanist. Before long, the re-formed choir was beating its rivals in local eisteddfodau, notably winning first prize at Llanharan. Before long, John Haydn Davies began entering his choir in the national eisteddfodau. However, at Dolgellau in 1949, the Treorchy choir was beaten into second place – by just seven points – by the more experienced Morriston Orpheus Choir; it was the last time that Treorchy ever lost to Morriston!

In 1950 the choir travelled to Aberystwyth for that year's National Eisteddfod

and won the first prize of £120 and the Welsh Guards Challenge Cup. Its performance of the setting of *Psalm 23* by Franz Schubert (1797-1828) – sung in Welsh as *Yr arglwydd yw fy mugail* [theirs on ALN 1963] – won especially high praise, with the chair of the adjudicators claiming that 'only once in a century one hears such marvellous singing which brings tears to one's eyes'.

In 1928 the thirty-year-old-African-American bass Paul Robeson made his first appearance outside the USA in the London premiere of Jerome Kern's *Show Boat*. Some ten years later Robeson took part in *The Proud Valley*, a film set in a Welsh coal-mining town which told of a black American taking a job there and joining the local male-voice choir.

The 1950s proved to be a triumphant decade for the Treorchy Male Choir culminating at the National Eisteddfod of 1959 in Caernarvon. This was its fifth consecutive win, beating the previous record of four held by the Morriston Orpheus. However, this run of success was not yet over for, in 1961, the Treorchy added a sixth victory at Rhosllanerchrugog, and its then conductor, John Haydn Davies was awarded the MBE for services to Welsh Choral Music. A few years after this, Davies handed the baton to John Cynan Jones, a well-known local conductor whose father-in-law had been the Choir's bass soloist. As Conductor Emeritus, Davies lived on until 1991.

Over the years, the Treorchy Male Choir included countless hymns and sacred songs in its concerts and recordings, many of Welsh origin. For example, *Llef* [4], which in English means 'a cry', is a well-known Welsh hymn tune composed by Griffith Hugh Jones, whose bardic name was *Gutyn Arfon*. It was written 1890 in memory of Jones' brother, Dewi, and sometimes also appears under the Latin title, *Deus salutis*. One of the most famous Welsh hymn tunes is *Cwm Rhondda* (Rhondda Valley) [7]. It was composed by John Hughes (1873-1932) and is usually sung to the words *Guide me, O thou great Jehovah* (or Redeemer) [...] which were originally written in Welsh (Arglwydd, arwain trwy'r anialwch) by William Williams, known as *Pantycelyn* who was also referred to as 'the sweet singer of Wales'. *Calon lân* (A Pure Heart) [5] is also one of those hymns that has been sung throughout Wales in chapels and at singing festivals for many a year. With words by *Gwylsydd* (Daniel James) and music by another **John Hughes** (1872- 1914), this one known as *Glandŵr*, this hymn has become very much associated with the Welsh rugby team and is regularly sung before its matches.

© **Peter Avis, June 2017** (*excerpted from the fuller Treorchy note in their ALN 1963*)

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Musical Concepts
c/o ALTO Distribution
Magnus House
8 Ashfield Rd
Cheadle SK81BB, UK



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