

GOWER FESTIVAL GWYL GWYR

Dear All

Please find below another Mumbling from the Maestro and below that a link to a very clever video of a professional 'one-man band' from BBC NOW which was kindly sent to me by one of the Gower Festival Friends.

I hope you enjoy both - feedback - good or bad - is very welcome!

Best wishes,

Anne

Well - are you coping without your annual Gower Festival "fix"? I'm missing it all more than I thought I would. I love ambling around Gower's pretty lanes to find the fabulous little churches and the atmosphere at the concerts is always special. I suppose - hand on heart - I don't miss sitting on the hard wooden pews but there again the numbness soon wears off with the aid of a glass of interval wine (or a cold beer as there was last year - nice one G.F.!). At least the flies, wasps and midges that inhabit the Gower churchyards are having a far more peaceful summer without us swatting away at them.

I've been thinking; when I started out as a musician (which was admittedly a few decades ago), wherever and whenever I played in concerts or musical theatre shows, or indeed any event, we used to either begin or end the proceedings with *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*.

Sometimes *God Save The Queen* as well. It used to be played on TV stations when they closed down and at the end of the films in cinemas. TV stations don't close down anymore and by the time the credits roll at the end of a film the cinemas are empty. Can you think of other occasions it was used - but sadly no longer?

In the 70s and 80s, I had a job playing four nights a week - sometimes more, in Swansea's biggest night club 'The Top Rank', which was an enormous barn of a place on the Kingsway. It isn't there anymore - the last time I looked there was just a hole in the ground! For five years, I was part of a nine-piece band that played mainly the pop music of the day through

loudspeakers as tall as a house, at 'foundation cracking' volume, for upwards of a thousand high spirited revellers. The night always finished at 2 am with *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*. In fact, there was one occasion when there was a very swish celebrity dinner dance at the ballroom and the band of which I was a member, shared the night with Kenny Ball and his Jazzmen. It was their lot to go on for the last "set" and they played a jazzed up version of it at the end - which was brilliant.

So, you may well be thinking "Ah - *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*, the official National Anthem of Wales - well, you are WRONG! There is a quite a good story here. So, let's start at the very beginning (as Maria Von Trapp would say).

In the mid 19th Century, a bloke called James James ran a pub in Pontypridd, where he regularly encouraged dances and he played the harp. He wouldn't have been able to do so during 'Lockdown' of course - but this was in the pre-Corona Virus era - remember that?! In about late 1855, he composed a little jig (in 6/8 time). We would recognise the melody as that of *Hen Wlad fy Nhadau* but very different - it was a spritely, happy little number (try singing the melody really quickly - you know a sort of "Diddly - diddly - diddly - dee - a diddly - diddly - diddly -dee" and so on). Apparently, it went down a storm with the punters after a few glasses of warm and frothy beer on a Saturday night. His father, Evan certainly liked it. He made up a poem called *Glan Rhondda* to accompany it. In order to accommodate the words, the tempo of the song became slower and much more the sedate 3/4 melody we know today. The original handwritten manuscript copy exists in the National Library of Wales - and for those that have ever played it - the original is written in F major and not in E flat which is the key always used today.

Hen Wlad fy Nhadau was first sung in performance by Elizabeth John, in the vestry of Tabor Chapel in Maesteg. (The chapel isn't there anymore, but it was on the site of what is now Maesteg Workingmen's Club). The new song made quite an impression upon those present and there were lots of hearty congratulations and compliments to the James'. Loads of people asked "Hey wus, when are you going to write another one then?"

Actually, I don't know whether they did write anything else of note and all this would probably be lost in the mists of time, had not the Llangollen Eisteddfod included a competition for the best collection of unpublished Welsh airs. A chap called Thomas

Llewelyn of Aberdare put forward his collection - well it's nice to have a hobby and there wasn't a lot to do of an evening in the 1850s - and he lived in Aberdare for goodness sake! The collection included *Glan Rhondda*. He changed the name to the song's first line: "Mae Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau" - "the old nation of my fathers," although it's typically called "Land of my Fathers" in English. It was a great success. James James who lived until 1902, saw his little Ponty pub ditty grow into a standard feature of patriotic events. Even the magnificent Adelina Patti, who was truly a superstar of international stature and who made her home in Craig Y Nôs near Abercrave, led an estimated crowd of 30,000 in a performance of *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* (in Welsh of course) at the National Eisteddfod held in Brecon in 1899. Although attempts have been made to translate the words into English, *Hen Wlad fy Nhadau* is always sung in Welsh - just ask John Redwood and he'll verify that fact; he knows the words really well.

In 1905 there was a tour of Great Britain by the New Zealand rugby team. Many assume the All Blacks' haka to be a relatively modern gimmick, but they were doing it even then. As they prepared to play Wales, an administrator of the Wales Rugby Union asked a Welsh team member named Teddy Morgan (evidently considered to have a have a fine, strong voice) to lead the crowd in the national anthem of Wales. Now - here's the interesting bit he should have sung *God Bless the Prince of Wales* (written for the marriage of Edward VII) but *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* was the one Teddy Morgan chose and the crowd sang lustily. For the first time ever the players and crowd sang an anthem before a sporting event and it all started here, Wales, because we wanted to mitigate the infamous haka used by New Zealand. By the way, we won the game 3-0 with Morgan scoring the winning try. Since that fateful day *Hen Wlad fy Nhadau* has increasingly been sung at patriotic gatherings, and it has gradually developed into Wales' national anthem. Interestingly, even today, it is neither officially or legally recognised as such.

Did you know that versions of *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* exist in Cornwall (as *Bro Goth Agan Tasow*) and Brittany (as *Bro Goz ma Zadoù*) and in Patagonia. There's also a version sung in India. The Khasi people in North East India have adopted it as their own - *Ri Khasi* is sung to the same tune. This goes back to the 1800's when Welsh medical missionaries went to the area.

There's even a story that a group of explorers came across a tribe of cannibals in the deepest darkest jungle, who were heard singing what sounded like familiar snatches of *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*. Upon questioning the chief of the tribe told them that a Welsh missionary had indeed visited the area some ten years previously. The explorers asked "What happened to him?" The chief replied - "Oh we ate him. So there's a little bit of Welsh in all of us!"

So - when was the last time you heard *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* performed in a concert, show or even a dance? Not for a while I'd wager. I think that's very sad!

More Mumblings soon

Mumbling Maestro of Mumbles

And the video link:

<https://www.facebook.com/bbcnationalorchestraofwales/videos/1584505388385254/UzpfSTczNTcxMzY1NDoxMDE1Nzc0MTIwNzEzMzY1NQ/>