

DAVID WYNNE

David C F Wright DMus

David Wynne was born at Penderyn near Hirwaun, Glamorgan in 1900 but the following year moved to Llanfabon near Cilfyndd. He left school at the age of twelve to work a 76 hour week at a local grocer for one-and-sixpence a week. On his fourteenth birthday he began working at the coalface of the Albion Colliery and continued until he was twenty-five, when he decided to enter for the Glamorgan Scholarship. He had read academic treatises by Prout and Kitson and been impressed by some orchestral concerts in Cardiff, where he began to study at University College, before moving on to Bristol University. In 1927, he examined two 20th-century masterpieces, Bartok's String Quartet No.3 and Schoenberg's Five Orchestral Pieces.

From 1929 to 1961, he was music master at Lewis School, Pengam but had relatively little time to compose. The majority of his music was written during his semi-retirement.

It was in 1944 that his String Quartet No.1 won the A.J. Clements Memorial Prize. It is a romantic work and has a folksy feel about it. It is eminently likeable and friendly. It is a splendid piece. The Piano Sonata No.1 of 1947 shows influences of Bartok and Tippett and, at times, achieves brilliant excitement. The Piano Sonata No. 2 of 1956 generates a purposeful, forward-moving drive, particularly with its vigorous rhythmic pulses. The period up to 1961 saw an impressive array of chamber music including a String Trio (1946), Piano Trio (1946), Sonatina for viola and piano (1946), two Sonatas for violin and piano (1948 and 1952), Sonata for viola and piano (1951), Sonatina for trumpet (1956) and one for trombone (1956) and a Clarinet Quintet (1959). His extensive output of chamber music amounts to a major potential contribution to British musical life and deserves to be taken up.

The Symphony No.1 (1952) is a large forty-minute work as yet unperformed. The Symphony No.2 was commissioned by the Guild for the Promotion of Welsh Music and first performed at the Aberdare Royal National Eisteddfod in 1956 by the London Symphony Orchestra under the incomparable Hermann Scherchen. It is a large-scale work with an opening movement of nervous energy, although the tension is sometimes lost. The rhythmic second movement is exciting but rather exhausting. The third movement has moments of great lyricism, whereas the finale continues in the style of the opening movement. It is a work of Germanic seriousness and integrity. The Symphony No 3 of 1963 was inspired by Caerphilly Castle. This is a fine work both tragic and serene and was premiered at the Caerphilly Festival of 1963 by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra under Sir Charles Groves. I value a recording of a broadcast made by Bryden Thomson, a performance which captures the work's formidable power.

There are four concertante works - the Rhapsody Concerto for violin and orchestra (1956); the unperformed Fantasia Concerto for two pianos (three hands) (1962); Fantasia Concertante for viola and orchestra (1964) and the Fantasia for piano and orchestra (1972). Why the composer used the title 'fantasia' is open to question. He also wrote two Fantasias for orchestra (1957 and 1962). Perhaps he was trying to convey an improvisatory feel.

From 1961 he taught composition at Cardiff College of Music and Drama and during this time turned to a type of serialism as an emancipation from tradition and tonality. His Piano Trio No.2 (1965) is a fascinating conflict between the twelve notes heard in serial fashion and freely atonal idiom. The Piano Sonata No. 4 (1966) is full of drama, tension and silences. Music for Harp (1966) is equally complex.

David Wynne also wrote some excellent light music. A Welsh Suite for orchestra (1961) is both simple and delightful, as are the two separate Cymric Rhapsodies of 1962.

His choral and vocal music is full of interest. An example of this is Evening Shadows (1971), four songs for soprano and piano which Argo included on a recording in 1974 (ZRG 769) in which these beautiful retrospective songs were sung by the wonderful Janet Price. This is an example of the very best of British song cycles.

When I was in Cardiff some years ago a famous Welsh composer told me that David Wynne was a far better composer than either Britten or Tippett. "David has a greater fecundity of ideas, far more skill and originality, and in his music there is heart as well as brain."

In one of the songs of Evening Shadows these lines appear:

If I had known that old age would call
I'd shut the gate, replied "Not at home!"
And refused to meet him.

David Wynne died at Pencoed in 1983. He is a composer to whom the gate should be opened. To bar him is to miss an extraordinary and outstanding composer.

Selected works

Works published by University of Wales Press, Oriana Publications Limited, and at the Welsh Music Information Centre

Stage

Jack and Jill, opera (1975)
Night and Cold Peace, opera (1978)
Cain (1981)

Orchestral

Symphony No.1 (1952); unperformed
Elegy for string orchestra (1953)
Berceuse for string orchestra (1954)
Prelude, Air and Dance (1955)
Symphony No.6 (1955)
Symphony No.2 (1956); commissioned by the Guild for the Promotion of Welsh Music
Fantasia No.1 (1957); commissioned by the National Youth Orchestra of Wales
Sinfonietta for string orchestra (1958)
A Welsh Suite (1961)
Symphony No.3 (1963); premiered at the Caerphilly Festival
Symphony No.4; incomplete
Cymric Rhapsody No.1 (1965)
Prelude (1968)
Cymric Rhapsody No.2 (1969)
Divertimento for string orchestra (1974)
Octad (1977)
Songs for string orchestra
Three Pieces for Orchestra
Concertante
Rhapsody No.1 for violin and orchestra (1957)
Fantasia Concerto for viola and orchestra (1961)
Fantasia Concerto for 2 pianos (3 hands) and orchestra (1962); unperformed
Fantasia for piano and orchestra (1972)

Chamber music

String Quartet No.1 (1944)
String Trio (1945)
Piano Trio No.1 (1946)
Sonatina for viola and piano (1946)
Sonata No.1 for violin and piano (1948)
Sonata for viola and piano (1951)
Five Short Pieces for clarinet and piano (1956)
Sonata for trombone and piano (1956)
Sonata for trumpet and piano (1956)
Sonata No.2 for violin and piano (1957)
Quintet for clarinet and string quartet (1959)
Septet for flute, clarinet, bassoon and string quartet (1961)
String Quartet No.3 (1966)
Mosaic for percussion ensemble (1968)
Piano Trio No.2 (1968)
Duo for cello and piano (1970)
Quartet for violin, viola, cello and piano (1971)
String Quartet No.4 (1972)
Sextet for woodwind quintet and piano (1977)
Sonatina for violin and piano (1978)
Music for percussion ensemble (1979)
String Quartet No.5 (1980)
Quartet for oboe, viola, cello and double bass (1982)
Divertimento for 2 trumpets and 2 trombones
Postlude for 3 trumpets

Harp

Prelude and Dance (1963)
Music (1966)
Suite of Six Bagatelles

Organ

Sonata (1965)
Fanfare (1972)
Three Short Pieces (1973)

Piano

Sonata No.1 (1947)
Rondo Capriccioso for 2 pianos (1952)
Sonata No.2 (1956)
Suite of Three Pieces
Variations and Capriccio for 2 pianos (1965)
Sonata No.3 (1966)
Sonata No.4 (1966)
Six Studies (1973)
Four Welsh Folk Tunes
Six Miniatures

Vocal

Songs of Solitude for high voice and string orchestra with piano (1941)
Two Songs from a Child's Garden for high voice and piano (1941)
Y môr ynghwsg (The Sleeping Sea) for high voice and piano (1941)
6 Chân i denor a thelyn (6 Songs) for tenor and harp (1950)
Ebb and Flow for high voice and chamber ensemble (1960)
Coming Forth by Day for voice and piano (1964)
Evening Shadows for voice and piano (1971)
Night-Music for soprano, string quartet and piano (1974)
Aubade for voice and piano
A Cradle Song for voice and piano
Hwiangerdd Wyddelig (Irish Lullaby) for high voice and piano
Nocturne for low voice and piano
O rosyn, dos (Go, Lovely Rose) for tenor and piano
To Music for low voice and piano

Choral

Night Watch for mixed chorus and orchestra (1957)
Four Songs from the Chinese for female chorus (1963)
Y gelynnen (The Holly) for female chorus and piano (1963)
Great Is the Lord for mixed chorus and organ (1967)
Stafell Gynddylan for mixed chorus (1967)
Gwirebau (Axioms) for chorus and piano (1969)
Suite of Six Songs for youth choir and piano (1972)
A Gwent Symphony "Wentwood Thorn" for female chorus and orchestra (1973)
The Traveller for tenor and mixed chorus (1973)
Geni Crist for mixed chorus and organ (1979)
Two settings of Poems by William Blake for mixed chorus and harp (1980)
Owain ab Urien, Cantata for male chorus and chamber ensemble

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