

The Cambrian



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We Are Still Here

February/Chwefror 2019

Rydyn Ni Yma O Hyd

OUR ST. DAVID'S POTLUCK

Our next meeting will be the St David's Day potluck on Sunday, February 24 at the American Legion Post on Woodford Street from 3-6pm. RSVP to Jeanette and tell her what you will bring! crowfeather@cox.net

Music is the Welsh language's secret weapon

(Gareth Ceidiog Hughes)

Music is cultural power. It has the power to move, to inspire, to elicit emotions, to shape our perceptions. In the parlance of geopolitics, it is referred to as "soft power". Hard power is a proverbial big pointy stick. Military might is raw hard power.

Soft power is a delicious carrot. The more admired your culture is, the more people will want to follow it. There is much to admire about Welsh language culture. But is it being used to its full potential?

The Welsh language is at a pivotal juncture. It could wither and die. It could be lost forever. Or it could flourish. What happens depends on us; on what we do and how we harness its cultural power.

Music is a potent weapon in the fight to save the Welsh language. It could well be the most powerful weapon that we have. It should be pumped out at every available opportunity.

It shouldn't only be targeted at Welsh speakers. It should also be targeted at people who aren't fluent in the language.

Some might object to this idea. They might believe that people aren't interested in listening to music in a language they don't understand.

But while everyone may not understand the Welsh language, but the vast majority of people understand the language of music.

Music is so much more than words. It's been described as a universal language. It is the language of melody, the language rhythm, of pitch, tone and tempo.

If music is a universal language then Welsh language music has universal appeal.

To believe that Welsh language music can't appeal to English language audiences is to ascribe to a rather narrow Anglo-centrism. Our horizons stretch beyond those stultifying confines.

The worldwide smash hit "Despacito" by Luis Fonsi ft. Daddy Yankee has nearly six billion views on Youtube. As the title suggests, the song is in Spanish. This did not stop it from becoming a hit in the US and the UK. Music transcends language barriers. This is just as true for music in the Welsh language as any other. Teenage rock duo Alfa recently became the first band pass one million plays with a Welsh language song on the streaming service Spotify with their song Gwenwyn (Poison).

It's an extraordinary achievement. Is there any reason why this couldn't become ordinary for Welsh language musicians in time? Why shouldn't it be the norm?

If you haven't listened to the song yet, you should. It's brilliant. Add it to your playlists. Share it with your friends.

Alffa have picked up fans across the UK and the US, as well as in countries such as Brazil, Mexico and Poland.

The band was chosen to take part in the Horizons project. It's collaboration between BBC Wales and the Arts Council of Wales to promote new Welsh music.

The song's success is due in part to PYST, a Welsh global distribution and label service set up aimed at Welsh indie labels. It got the song on Spotify playlists Walk Like A Badass and The Rock List, alongside artists such as Arctic Monkeys, The Strokes and The White Stripes. In an article for the Guardian Alun Llwyd, the chief executive of PYST, said: "What's beautiful is that Spotify judge the songs on music merit, not the language or the band. Nobody knew Alffa outside a small part of Wales. This is testament to the strength of the song.

"There's a massive, organic growth thanks to the digital revolution. Streaming has made it more of a level playing field. The fact that Alffa sing in Welsh has no bearing on how far their music can travel, something that seemed impossible for a minority language in years gone by. This is just the beginning."

The digital revolution has levelled the playing field. The Welsh language has faced structural disadvantages for centuries. It was banished from public life, banned from the courts, white-washed from road signs and from public view in general.

I still wouldn't describe the playing field as level. It continues to be slanted against Welsh speakers. But the digital revolution has made it more of a fair fight. Alffa have proved that Welsh language music can compete with the best and win. As a nation we punch above our weight.

If music in the Welsh language can compete on Spotify and win, then why not English language radio stations too?

Music is one thing that we Welsh do really rather well. It is perhaps what we do best. It's woven into our culture.

This is rooted in our cultural traditions, such as the Eisteddfod festival where Welsh speakers get together to share their pride in who they are.

It's one of the main reasons the Welsh language still lives. It's an expression of its vitality, its vibrancy.

In his poem "In Passing" Brian Harris said: "To be born Welsh, is to be born privileged, not with a silver spoon in your mouth but music in your blood and poetry in your soul". He's right. So why not play to our strengths?

Dydd Miwsic Cymru or Welsh Language Music Day should be pretty self-explanatory. It's a great initiative backed by the likes of Radio 1 DJ Huw Stephens.

It's on February 8 and I would urge everyone to get involved by listening to, discovering and sharing the wonderful music that the Welsh language has to offer.

Music is an enormous part of most people's lives. On average people spend around 4.5 hours a day listening to music. The more of that time we can get people listening to music in the Welsh language, the better.

To connect the Welsh language in people's minds, hearts, and souls with music, is to connect it with their lives and with their identities. Ysgol Bro Llew in Penygroes, Dyffryn Nantlle, Gwynedd has started playing Welsh language music in the schoolyard. Every school in Wales can follow this example. We need more initiatives like this.

We shouldn't underestimate its potential as a boon for the Welsh economy either.

We're a nation with humility; perhaps too much. We're not a nation of show-offs. We're not particularly good at tooting our own horns. We're only a nation of horn-tooters in the literal sense, not the metaphorical one.

It's commendable in many ways. However, it does have its drawbacks. Let's not allow our

aversion to arrogance become an impediment to sharing our pride and our passion.

The success of Alfa wasn't an accident. It happened because they made brilliant music. But crucially it happened because they got it in front of an audience. There is a lesson here. People can't embrace music or a language they don't get to hear.

The Welsh language music scene is bursting with talent. Let's share that talent with the world.

The field at the heart of concerns over the Welsh language

(By Robert Harries)

There are fears for the future of the Welsh language in a small village after plans for a new housing development in a field were approved. Plans for 33 new homes to be built in Llanrhaeadr-yng-Nghinmeirch have been submitted to the local council on land which is a stone's throw from the site of 15 other new homes which are already under construction.

The proposals were given the green light at a planning committee meeting on Wednesday morning, even though concerns have been raised that an influx of new residents in the village, which has a current population of just over 1,800 people, will damage the Welsh speaking community.

The village itself is known as something of a Welsh stronghold, with more than half its inhabitants able to speak the language. Between 2001 and 2011, there was a drop of 9% in the number of Welsh speakers in the area.

But, according to the 2011 census, 50.03% of residents aged three or over still used Welsh as their main language. The new housing development will see that reduced, it is claimed, to 49%, tipping the balance from a Welsh speaking perspective from a majority to a minority for the first time.

At last week's planning committee, 11 voted in favour, seven voted against, while one committee member abstained when asked to vote on

plans that will see the houses built on the field in Denbighshire.

One councillor who spoke against the plans at the meeting is Joe Welch, chair of the planning committee at Denbighshire Council.

"This area is one of a few in Wales that has more than 50% of its residents speaking regularly in Welsh," he said.

"The company that submitted the plans has admitted that the number of Welsh speakers is going to go down in Llanrhaeadr - they say the figure will go down from 50.03% to just over 49%. It's only a 1% decrease but in my opinion it is a crucial 1%.

"More consideration should be given to the Welsh language to ensure that this majority is kept, and of course one of the best ways of getting more Welsh speakers is through education. The local primary school - Ysgol Bro Cymeirch - is already nearly full, so it will not be able to accommodate an influx of new pupils. "That means that children living in the village will have to go to school elsewhere, so whether that is to be taught in the medium of Welsh or English, they will be taught outside the community.

"A 1% drop may not seem huge; if it was 75% going down to 74%, that would still be a concern, but from over 50% to under 50% means a majority Welsh speaking village becomes a minority Welsh speaking village."

There are also concerns beyond the potential detrimental effect the 33 new houses could have on the Welsh language, as one resident explains.

"I live in the middle of the village and near to where the new houses are going to be built," said Elfed Williams, chair of the local community council.

"This idea has proved to be very unpopular here. It went in front of the community council and the opposition was unanimous. On top of that, a number of other residents have opposed the plan.

"There are 15 houses already under construction across the road, meaning that there will be

almost 50 new homes in the village within a few years, all off the A525, which is a main trunk road through the Clwyd area.

"It's already a really busy road, especially in the morning and between 4pm and 5.30pm, and this new development means there will be about five entrances onto the road within about 300 or 400 yards, and there have already been a number of accidents on the road since I've lived here."

Cadnant Planning, who submitted the planning application on behalf of the landowner, say that affordable housing will form part of the development, and that a number of different properties will be available at the site which will provide for the needs of the local community.

Sioned Edwards from Cadnant told the BBC: "It's important to note that, between 2001 and 2011, the population of Llanrhaeadr reduced. "Population growth is a part of creating prosperity in villages and communities that are sustainable. Therefore we have to accept that there is a need to develop houses that will provide for young people."

Mr Williams thinks the development will shift the dynamic in his village, and lead the community to a point of no return.

"We do have a vibrant community and my concern is that the new estate will become isolated," he said.

"There is no room in the local school for any more children so children who move into the new homes will have to go to Denbigh or Ruthin. That means that people moving into the area will not be able to feel a part of the community.

"The likelihood is that they will be mostly English speakers, and we are talking about one of the only areas in county where Welsh is still a majority language and if you go past that tipping point it's very difficult to come back.

"There is a village feel here and it's a good community. This will change the dynamic of the linguistics and the whole feel of the village."

The Urdd Eisteddfod has upset Piers Morgan and this is why

By Abbie Wrightwick (North Wales Live)
TV presenter Piers Morgan has blasted the Urdd Eisteddfod as "sexist" over a decision to ban boys from taking part in its netball tournament.

Boys will no longer be allowed to take part in the national competition which takes place in May.

It comes after organisers claimed that boys' physical strength could put them at an advantage, reports Wales Online.

Children across the region have also hit out against the new rules for the Urdd's sports festival, which will be held in Aberystwyth, saying the sport isn't just for girls.

Good Morning Britain host Morgan has even taken to Twitter to criticise the move labelling it as "outrageous".

Pupils at Ysgol San Sior, in Llandudno, Conwy, won the county netball tournament last year and competed in the national competition.

Mason, 10, told the BBC: "Netball isn't just for girls, it's for boys and girls. If they're taking away netball from the boys, why don't they take a sport away from the girls?"

Ryley, also 10, said: "I'm normally a football person, but I wanted to try something different." "If girls are allowed to play football, why can't boys play netball?" said Florence, 10.

Ysgol San Sior teacher Lisa Jones said the school will still enter a team but it would now include girls from younger years.

She told the BBC the ban was "a bit of a shock", saying: "As far back as I can remember, we've been allowed to take boys to the tournament."

Pupils have written to the Urdd saying how disappointed they are.

But the Urdd Primary Schools Tournament will host a mixed gender football competition as well as both girls and boys rugby competitions. Netball is the only sport with a competition for just one gender.

Urdd Gobaith Cymru, which was set up in 1922 to provide opportunities for children through the medium of Welsh, said its rules for the competition in May are aimed at encouraging more girls to take part while boys' physical strength can put them at an advantage.

Spokeswoman Mali Thomas said the rules are looked at every year and would be looked at again later this year.

She said all participating schools were told last September that boys could not take part in netball.

The Urdd said in a statement: "The Urdd is committed to equality of opportunity and we aspire to provide safe and enjoyable opportunities for children and young people through our sports activities.

"Single sex sports are permitted under the Equality Act when differences in strength and physique would otherwise make the competition unfair.

"Following discussions with Sport Wales and Welsh Netball, the decision was made by the Urdd's sports panel in September 2018 to offer an all-girls primary netball tournament in 2019.

"The main reason for this decision is to ensure that girls are able to take part in a competition where the circumstances are fair for all.

"There is also a significant gender gap in terms of participation in sports between boys and girls, through offering an all-girls tournament in this sport with a clear pathway for continued participation from primary to secondary school age, we are actively taking steps to close the gender gap in sports participation.

"As an organisation we are very proud of the range of sports competitions that are offered to girls, boys and mixed teams, all of which adhere to the Department of Education guidelines and are reviewed annually as part of the sports department's continuous evaluation."

Welsh Netball's chief executive Sarah Jones said the rules of netball state it can be played by same gender or mixed gender teams.

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