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DO YOU HEAR THE PEOPLE SING? THE MALE VOICE CHOIRS OF WALES. By Gareth Williams. Gomer Press, Llandysul, 2015. Pp. xxii, 242, illus., pbk, £14.99.

There are few things more quintessentially associated with stereotypical and sometimes caricatured representations of Wales than male voice choirs. Professor Gareth Williams is well aware of this; yet, as he argues in this new book on the subject,

[t]he Welsh male voice choir is alive and well and impervious to cliché. Age has weathered but not withered it; its roots are too deep, continually watered by the loyalty and genuine affection of most of the population of Wales . . . [I]t is still one of the most popular and enduring emblems of Welsh identity. (p. xvii)

As readers of *The Welsh History Review* will be well aware, Gareth Williams is one of the foremost and most distinguished social historians of modern Wales. Over the past thirty-five years or more, his contribution to the historiography of Welsh popular culture has been extensive: some of his most prominent and significant books include *Fields of Praise: the Official History of the Welsh Rugby Union 1881–1981* (1981; co-authored with Dai Smith), *1905 And All That: Essays on Sport and Welsh Society* (1991), and *Valleys of Song: Music and Welsh Society 1840–1914* (1998; revised 2003). Although this is by no means his first publication examining the Welsh choral tradition, *Do You Hear the People Sing?* is another important piece of work, which sets out to provide the definitive history of the Welsh male voice choir, from its beginnings in the early nineteenth century through to the present day.

The book opens with a brief but engagingly written foreword by Tim Rhys-Evans; this, given his position as the founder and musical director of the popular modern choir Only Men Aloud, neatly embodies one of the central arguments in *Do You Hear the People Sing?* – namely, the continuing relevance of choirs to Welsh popular culture. The structure of the volume consists of an introduction followed by three distinct sections, each of which deals with a different aspect of the history of male choirs in Wales. The introduction itself, although relatively brief, is nevertheless particularly useful in terms of placing the book's subject centrally in its broader chronological context – in particular, the industrial history of Wales from the nineteenth century onwards. As Williams notes, 'by tracing the chronology, geography and social origins of male voice choirs we are charting the contours of modern Welsh history' (p. xxi).

The first section of the book is in many respects its main part, as well as being the only one subdivided into individual chapters, twelve in total. These are arranged chronologically and examine the history of male voice

choirs in Wales, beginning in 1840 and continuing down to 2015. They are very detailed and chart both particularly significant developments within individual choirs, as well as retaining an overall perspective on Welsh male choral singing. The impact of the vicissitudes of the changing socio-economic context are also borne in mind throughout by Williams: the possibility of tours of the USA and elsewhere made possible by improvements in communications and transport, the adverse impact of the interwar depression on choirs based in the industrial heartlands of Wales, and the increasing preference for some choirs to opt to make records of their music rather than compete in the National Eisteddfod, are just some of the most prominent instances of this. This section concludes with a chapter appropriately entitled 'Yma o Hyd' ('Still Here'), a choral favourite which, looking back on the past, neatly encapsulates and summarizes the place of male voice choirs in Welsh society in the early twenty-first century.

The second section of the book does not follow the first section chronologically, instead shifting the focus onto what it terms the 'trailblazers' of the male voice choral tradition in Wales. It takes the form of a series of brief biographical discussions of the life and careers of those prominent individuals – Joseph Parry, Griffith Rhys Jones ('Caradog'), Tom Stephens, William Thomas, Harry Evans and Daniel Prothero – whose work in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was integral to the growth of the popularity of this genre of music in Wales, as well as its subsequent incorporation as an important component in representations of Welsh national identity.

The third section provides a comprehensive and authoritative summary of all the winning male voice choirs at the National Eisteddfod from 1881 down to 2015, as well as other pertinent historical details – including, as the book's rear cover notes, 'the stern and sometimes caustic remarks of adjudicators'. There is an exhaustive level of detail here, which further reinforces the position of *Do You Hear the People Sing?* as the definitive history of Welsh male voice choirs; anyone wanting to know what were the test pieces sung at the 1881 Merthyr Eisteddfod or what the prize money was for the 1959 Caernarfon Eisteddfod, for instance, need look no further. To a certain extent this section of the book functions essentially as an appendix to the two preceding sections, although it is sprinkled throughout with knowledgeable and insightful commentary on points of particular interest or significance.

Anyone familiar with his other writings will no doubt recognize *Do You Hear the People Sing?* as being the work of Gareth Williams. Throughout, it demonstrates his characteristic style of prose: engaging and witty, whilst simultaneously learned and detailed. The book is forthright in its analysis without ever being iconoclastic and contrary for the sake of it: in the intro-

duction, for instance, he notes that 'it is with the industrial history of Wales that the popular mind associates the Welsh male choir, and the popular mind is right' (p. xviii). Written, as it is, by a knowledgeable enthusiast for choral singing and a member of the famous Pendyrus Male Voice Choir, *Do You Hear the People Sing?* is very much a book for the choral enthusiast as well as the historian. It is a definite strength for this book to be written by someone who understands the complexity and nuance in the music of the choirs, as this helps to sharpen and better inform the historical assessment of the details of the genre and the intense rivalries between competing choirs.

Although it is a comprehensive and detailed piece of work by the foremost historian in this particular field, the volume appears to have been written and presented in such a way as to maximize its potential audience amongst the general public as well as amongst academics. Consequently, it does not feature some of the trappings of an 'academic' study, such as footnotes and also any real engagement with the historiography of the field, beyond listing it in its extensive bibliography. This is in no sense intended as a criticism, merely an observation.

Overall, then, *Do You Hear the People Sing?* is another bravura performance by the outstanding virtuoso in this particular field. It is essential reading for anyone interested in Welsh male voice choirs and their history, as well as providing a very useful and informative case study for students of music history and Welsh social history more generally.

BEN CURTIS

Cardiff University

ENGLYNION MYNWENTYDD GWLAD LLŶN A'R CYFFINIAU. Gan Gwyn Neale. Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, Llanrwst, 2015. Tt. 510. £16.50.

Casgliad yw hwn o'r englynion a welir ar gerrig beddi yn Llŷn, ac fe fydd yn gaffaeliad i bawb sydd â diddordeb yn y traddodiad o gynnwys englyn mewn arysgrif. Mae yma ôl gwaith ymchwil trylwyr, gan fod yr awdur wedi ymweld â phob mynwent yn Llŷn, a chofnodi nid yn unig yr englyn ei hun ond hefyd yr arysgrif y mae'n rhan ohoni. Cawn felly gryn dipyn o wybodaeth am y cyd-destun – y dyddiad y bu farw'r unigolyn a goffeir, a'r cefndir teuluol a chymdeithasol. Bu hefyd yn tynnu lluniau o'r arysgrifau, ac mae nifer o'r rhain i'w gweld yn y llyfr.

Cyflwynir y deunydd fesul mynwent, a'r rhain wedi eu gosod yn nhrefn y wyddor, gan ddechrau ym mynwent eglwys y plwyf yn Aberdaron, a gorffen ym mynwent gyhoeddus Ynys Enlli. Nid yw'n glir pam y rhoddwyd yr arysgrifau o fewn mynwentydd penodol yn y drefn sydd yma: efallai bod