

## Merched Ceulan 1981–

Yn ystod hanner cyntaf yr ugeinfed ganrif, roedd bwrlwm cerddorol anhygoel i'w weld ym mhentref Tal-y-bont, gyda cherddorfeydd, partïon canu a chorau i blant ac oedolion yn ffynnu. Yn dilyn yr oes aur honno, fodd bynnag, bu cyfnod hesb o ran canu corawl hyd nes i Geraint Thomas, o ddiwedd y saithdegau ymlaen, ddechrau ailosod Tal-y-bont ar y map eisteddfodol gyda'i lwyddiant fel arweinydd egnïol corau plant o'r Ysgol Gynradd lle roedd ef yn brifathro.

Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Maldwyn a'r Cyffiniau, a oedd i'w chynnal ym Machynlleth ym mis Awst 1981, oedd y digwyddiad a sbardunodd Eleri Huws, Tŷ Gwyn, Tal-y-bont, i sefydlu côr merched yn y pentref. Ar y pryd, roedd hi'n dysgu'r delyn a cherdd dant yn Ysgol Bro Ddyfi, ac wrthi'n paratoi disgyblion i gystadlu yn yr Eisteddfod honno. Teimlai y byddai'n gyfle da i annog merched ardal *Papur Pawb* i gymryd rhan hefyd, ac i roi blas o hen grefft Cerdd Dant iddynt. Gwyddai Eleri, o'i chysylltiad â'r Gymdeithas Ddiwylliadol, Capel Bethel, Merched y Wawr a'r Clwb Ffermwyr Ifanc, nad oedd prinder o ferched oedd yn meddu ar leisiau da a fyddai'n barod i roi ymrwymiad fel aelodau o gôr. Sefydlwyd y côr yn swyddogol, felly, yn gynnar yn 1981 a mabwysiadwyd yr enw 'Merched Ceulan' i adlewyrchu'r ardal.

Dechreuwyd arni ar unwaith i ddysgu'r darnau gosod ar gyfer cystadleuaeth y Parti Cerdd Dant Agored ym Machynlleth ond, cyn hynny, rhaid oedd gwneud un penderfyniad mawr – sef beth i'w wisgo ar gyfer yr achlysur pwysig hwnnw! Ar y pryd, yr arferiad gyda chorau a phartïon cerdd dant oedd gwisgo ffrogiau llawn, laes, o ddeunyddiau blodeuog megis rhai cwmni Laura Ashley – a golygfa ddoniol ar faes eisteddfodol, gwlyb, oedd gweld y ffrogiau hynny'n cael eu codi uwchben y pen-glin gan ddangos welingtons mwdlyd oddi tanynt! Penderfynodd Merched Ceulan dorri tir newydd mewn sawl ffordd, gan ddewis ffrogiau plaen, lliw glas y llynges, yn cyrraedd at y pen-glin, a gynlluniwyd gan gwmni Antony Sheppard o Fachynlleth. Mawr fu'r sylu a'r sylw, ond parodd y ffrogiau buddiol hyn am sawl

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During the first half of the twentieth century, Tal-y-bont was a hive of musical activity where orchestras, singing parties and choirs for children and adults flourished. Following that golden age, however, there was a period of inactivity insofar as choral singing was concerned until Geraint Thomas, from the end of the 1970s onwards, once again brought success to the village as the energetic conductor of choirs from the primary school of which he was headmaster.

It was the National Eisteddfod to be held at Machynlleth in August 1981 which provided Eleri Huws, Tŷ Gwyn, Tal-y-bont, with a reason to establish a ladies' choir once again in the village. At the time, she was a part-time teacher of harp and *cerdd dant* at Ysgol Bro Ddyfi, Machynlleth, and was preparing pupils there to take part in several competitions. In order to involve ladies from the *Papur Pawb* area in the eisteddfod, and to give them an opportunity to learn the art of singing *cerdd dant*, she formed the choir – Merched Ceulan – early in 1981.

Rehearsals were soon under way to prepare for the competition at Machynlleth, but one burning issue needed to be addressed immediately – what was the choir going to wear for the big occasion? The fashion at the time for *cerdd dant* parties was to wear full-length dresses of floral materials, such as those made by Laura Ashley – and a common sight on wet eisteddfod fields was choristers hitching up their long skirts above the knee, to reveal an expanse of muddy wellingtons! Merched Ceulan, however, bravely decided to be at the cutting edge of fashion, choosing knee-length dresses in a plain, airforce blue material designed and made by Antony Sheppard of Machynlleth. Although they raised a few eyebrows at the time, these servicable dresses lasted for several years, usefully disguising the effects of overindulgence – and even a couple of pregnancies! The choir sang for the first time at Dinas Mawddwy village hall where, according to the minutes, 'we were

blwyddyn, gan guddio olion gor-fwyta – ac ambell fabi hefyd! Canodd y côr am y tro cyntaf mewn rhagbrofion yn neuadd bentref Dinas Mawddwy ac, yn ôl y cofnodion, 'Ni chafwyd llwyfan, ond derbyniwyd beirniadaeth dda'!

Ym mis Medi 1981 y canodd y côr am y tro cyntaf yn Nhal-y-bont, a hynny yn noson agoriadol tymor Merched y Wawr, gan gyflwyno trefniant o 'Mae 'nghariad i'n Fenws' yn ogystal ag eitemau cerdd dant. Am gyfnod, canolbwyntiwyd ar ddatblygu *repertoire* amrywiol y gellid dewis ohono i gynnal nosweithiau mewn sefydliadau lleol; buan y daeth geiriau J.R. Jones, 'Llynnoedd', ar alaw gan Eleri Huws, yn fath o *signature tune* i'r côr, a chlywodd cynulleidfaoedd ymhell ac agos am 'Conach a Phlas-y-mynydd, Nantcagal a Moel-llyn'.

Yn ystod blynyddoedd cynnar y côr, canolbwyntiwyd ar ddau brif fath o weithgaredd, sef cadw nosweithiau i gymdeithasau amrywiol, a chystadlu mewn ambell eisteddfod fechan megis Llanfachreth, y Borth a Llanilar – a chafwyd cryn lwyddiant ar gystadlaethau cerdd dant a chorawl. Diddanwyd cynulleidfaoedd o Fachynlleth i Fronant gan eitemau o gerdd dant, caneuon ysgafn, caneuon gwerin, caneuon crefyddol, ac ati. Roedd yn y côr hefyd gyfoeth o ddoniau unigol – yn gantorion, llefarwyr ac offerynwyr – a

not staged in the competition, but were given a good adjudication'!

It was in September 1981 that the choir first sang on home ground, at a *Merched y Wawr* meeting in Tal-y-bont school. For a while, the choir concentrated on developing a varied repertoire of items which could be used to compile a programme suitable for local societies. 'Llynnoedd' ('Lakes'), a poem by J.R. Jones of Pant-haul, Tal-y-bont, set to a melody by Eleri Huws, soon became a signature tune with which the choir usually opened their programme.

During the early years, the choir mainly concentrated on two types of activity, namely entertaining audiences from various societies, mainly local, and also competing at small eisteddfodau such as Llanfachreth (Dolgellau), Borth and Llanilar – where they gained many successes in the choral and *cerdd dant* competitions. The choir was fortunate in having several talented individuals as members, and audiences far and wide enjoyed entertainment of a high standard which put Tal-y-bont on the cultural map locally. The early minutes also show the choir's fondness for dinners and parties – and, no doubt, husbands and fathers should be thanked for many hours of babysitting in the name of 'culture'!

In 1988, Eleri Huws had to resign as conductor, and Eirwen Hughes, Pencwm,



*Merched Ceulan ar noson cinio ffarwel i Eleri Huws.*

*Merched Ceulan at the farewell dinner to Eleri Huws.*

llwyddid yn rhyfeddol i gynnal nosweithiau amrywiol o safon uchel, gan roi Tal-y-bont ar fap diwylliannol yr ardal. Dengys y cofnodion cynnar yn ogystal hoffter yr aelodau o giniawau a phartïon – diau y cadwyd gwŷr a thadau'n brysur yn aml yn gwarchod yn enw 'diwylliant', a rhaid diolch iddynt hwy am eu cyfraniad nodedig!

Yn 1988, bu'n rhaid i Eleri Huws roi'r gorau i'r arweinyddiaeth, a dewis ysbrydoledig oedd cael Eirwen Hughes, Pencwm, Penrhyn-coch, fel olynnydd iddi. Roedd Eirwen eisoes yn adnabyddus iawn yn yr ardal fel cantores lwyddiannus a chyfeilydd, a bwrodd i'r gwaith o arwain Merched Ceulan gyda brwdfrydedd. Dan ei harweinyddiaeth hi, ymestynnwyd ffiniau'r côr mewn sawl ffordd – o ran yr aelodaeth, y repertoire, a'r mathau o ddigwyddiadau a fynychid. O fewn byr amser, roedd y côr yn paratoi ar gyfer gwrandawiaid i raglen deledu, yn cymryd rhan mewn cyngerdd mawreddog i godi arian at Apêl Sganiwr

Penrhyn-coch, was an inspired choice as her successor. Eirwen was already very well-known as a successful soprano and accompanist, and she threw herself with gusto into her new responsibilities. Under her leadership, the choir developed in many ways – in its membership, its repertoire and the activities which it undertook. Very soon, the choir was taking part in auditions for a television programme, entertaining visitors on the Bandstand at Aberystwyth, singing in a Grand Concert to raise funds for the Bronglais Scanner Appeal, entertaining the Ceredigion Evacuees Society – and still remaining faithful to those small local societies which asked them for an evening's entertainment.

The main feature which has characterised the activities of Merched Ceulan during the past several years has been the way in which the choir has contributed generously and regularly to several charities – the large, well-known ones and small, local



*Eleri Huws (cyn-arweinydd) a Eirwen Hughes (arweinydd presennol) yn torri'r gacen pan oedd y côr yn ddeg oed, 1992.*

*Eleri Huws and Eirwen Hughes cutting the cake when the choir was ten years old, 1992.*

Ysbyty Bronglais, yn diddanu cynulleidfaoedd yn rheolaidd yn Safle'r Band ar bromenâd Aberystwyth, yn canu mewn cyngerdd i ddathlu Wythnos Cymdeithas Efaciwîs Ceredigion, ac yn parhau'n ffyddlon i'r cymdeithasau bychain gwledig hynny oedd yn gofyn am eu cymorth i gadw noson.

Yr hyn sydd wedi nodweddu gweithgareddau Merched Ceulan yn ystod y blynyddoedd diwethaf yw'r modd y maent wedi cyfrannu'n hael a chyson i lu o elusennau – o'r rhai mawr, cenedlaethol, i elusennau bychain lleol – trwy gynnal cyngherddau. Mae ffeiliau'r côr yn llawn dop o lythyrau o ddiolch diffuant gan ysgrifenyddion yr elusennau hyn, a hyfryd meddwl fod merched o'r ardal hon yn lliniaru poen a gofid cynifer o bobl gan roi pleser i lawer yr un pryd.

Yn ystod y blynyddoedd diwethaf mae Merched Ceulan wedi ymestyn eu ffiniau'n ddaearyddol hefyd, gyda theithiau i Iwerddon a Llundain, ac i fannau eraill y tu hwnt i'w milltir sgwâr. Trwy eu hymddangosiadau ar raglenni teledu megis 'Noson Lawen', a thrwy gyfrwng y casét a ryddhawyd yn 1995 a'r cryno-ddisg yn 2000 mae pobl trwy Gymru benbaladr wedi dod i glywed am Ferched Ceulan a'u doniau – a'u mwynhau.

Nid yw llwyddiant fel hyn yn dod yn hawdd – y mae'n galw am waith caled ac ymrwymiad llwyr ar ran yr arweinydd a phob aelod unigol fel ei gilydd. Diolchwn i aelodau Merched Ceulan am roi pleser i gynifer dros gyfnod o bron ugain mlynedd bellach, a dymunwn bob llwyddiant iddynt am flynyddoedd lawer i ddod.

*Eleri Huws*

appeals – by taking part in fund-raising concerts. The choir's files are full of thank-you letters from grateful organisers of charity events, and it is gratifying to know that local talents have helped to ease pain and suffering, whilst giving pleasure to many.

During the past few years, Merched Ceulan have travelled far afield, to Ireland, London and Manchester, to name but three venues. Through their appearance on the S4C programme *Noson Lawen*, their cassette released in 1995 and their CD in 2000, Merched Ceulan have taken the name of Tal-y-bont to a wider audience and are now enjoyed and appreciated throughout Wales.

Such success does not come easily – it takes hard work and commitment on behalf of the conductor and each individual member. We thank Merched Ceulan for the pleasure which they have brought to many over a period of almost twenty years, and we wish them every success in the future.

*Eleri Huws*