

DAVID WYNNE

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David Wynne was born at Penderyn near Hirwaun, Glamorgan in 1900, but the following year moved to Llanfabon near Cilfynydd. 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.

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