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## *Dora Herbert Jones, 1890–1974\**

by Gwenan Gibbard, BMus, MA

Dora Herbert Jones made an important contribution to the field of Welsh music during the first half of the twentieth century as a highly and much acclaimed singer of folk songs, as an accomplished and entertaining lecturer, as a popular and effective radio and television broadcaster and as a tireless and efficient worker for The Welsh Folk Song Society.

She was born in Llangollen, the youngest of John and Elinor Rowlands' five daughters, and her full name was Deborah Jarret Rowlands. Her father kept a grocer's shop in the town and Dora describes her mother as being a warm and welcoming person who enjoyed conversing and had much charm and a ready wit,<sup>1</sup> – traits which later became very obvious in Dora herself. Hers was a Welsh-speaking home where lecturers, *cymanfa ganu* conductors, politicians and many a preacher stayed from time to time, and Dora felt that she came to understand much about human nature in their company, and learnt early on how to socialize and converse.

Llangollen was an anglicised town at the turn of the twentieth century, with 'colonels and majors liberally dotted around the area'.<sup>2</sup> Welsh was not often heard on the streets or in the shops, but there were a number of Welsh chapels there and Welsh was definitely heard at Dora's father's shop, where he had cards with *Siaradwch Gymraeg* (Speak Welsh) on them prominently displayed. Dora felt he was a man before his time in many respects. He fervently believed in equal education opportunities for both sexes. When one old aunt suggested that instead of wasting his money on educating his daughters he had better take them around the local agricultural shows, or to Llandrindod in the summer, to find them husbands, John Rowlands replied, 'No Saran, if I have anything to leave these girls it'll be in their heads not in their pockets',<sup>3</sup> and indeed he saw fit to spend his money on sending his four elder daughters to Dr Williams's School in Dolgellau, as boarders, but by Dora's time, the new County School had opened in Llangollen, with John Rowlands one of its founders, and this is where Dora received her secondary education. It was at the County School, under the tuition of Carno Jones, the music teacher, that Dora first began to sing in public and thoroughly enjoyed it.

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\* The June Gruffydd Memorial Lecture, delivered to the Society at the British Academy on 15 February 2005, with Dr Rhian Davies in the chair.

<sup>1</sup> Dora Herbert Jones, *Y Llwybrau Gynt 2*, Alun Oldfield-Davies (ed.), (Llandysul, 1972), 93.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 91 [author's translation].

<sup>3</sup> Gerallt Lloyd Owen, NLW Video tape, *Cyfle Arall*, (television programme by BBC Cymru for S4C, 1982, repeat broadcast), producer: Nan Davies [author's translation].



Dora Herbert Jones

In 1908, Dora started on her degree course in Welsh at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. It was a heavy, all embracing course, 'seriously overloaded'<sup>4</sup> in her opinion and she admits that she did not work as she should have done, because there were so many societies and activities which attracted her attention and took up her time. In their midst, the Lit. and Deb. (the Literary and Debating Society), *Y Gymdeithas Geltaidd* (The Celtic Society), and of course singing. She says that she seemed to be continuously singing.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Dora Herbert Jones, *Y Llwybrau Gynt*, 98 [author's translation].

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

She sang soprano in a student quartet as well as frequently singing solos, and it was during her time at college that she first began singing in connection with the Welsh Folk Song Society, for Dr Mary Davies, the accomplished singer and founder member of The Welsh Folk Song Society, when she came to lecture at the college at Aberystwyth in 1910.

After graduating in 1912, Dora stayed on at the University and followed a year's course in Paleography. Dr Mary Davies was very keen that she should try to make a name for herself as a professional singer, but Dora herself did not think she had all the necessary qualities. During her final year at University she lost her mother, and in 1913, she went to London to work as a secretary for Sir John Herbert Lewis, Member of Parliament for Flintshire, and, apparently, she was the first woman to work in the House of Commons as a secretary to an MP. Dora lived with Sir John and Lady Herbert Lewis and the family up until 1916, the year she got married. She became firm friends with them, and Ruth Herbert Lewis, who was another of The Welsh Folk Song Society's founder members and one of the Society's foremost figures, had a very significant influence on Dora. The Herbert Lewis's home was an open house to young Welsh people in London at the time, and it was here that Dora met the gifted young composer and singer, Morfydd Llwyn Owen. They became friends and both were part of the very flourishing London Welsh life which centred on the Welsh chapel in Charing Cross.

Dora married Herbert Jones of Plas Blaenau, Llangernyw, a graduate of Jesus College, Oxford, who later became a commissioner in Nigeria. When the First World War broke out he joined the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, and, quite soon after he and Dora got married, he was sent to France where he was badly wounded in battle at Ypres, and was subsequently transferred to a London hospital. By the end of 1916 Dora too was in France, at Troyes near Verdun, as part of the efforts of Gwendoline and Margaret Davies, later of Gregynog, on behalf of the Red Cross, to nurse and entertain wounded French troops. She spent the whole winter of 1916-17 in France, singing in concerts, 'night after night'.<sup>6</sup> Although she knew them before coming to France, this was the real beginning of the very close relationship which developed between Dora and the Gregynog sisters.

By 1918, in the turbulent and highly dangerous times of the Irish rebellion, Dora was in Dublin, undertaking what she referred to as 'highly confidential'<sup>7</sup> work on behalf of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland at the Viceregal Lodge. She was back in London before the 1918 general election, in charge of Herbert Lewis's electoral arrangements. Dora was the first woman in Britain to be appointed as an electoral representative, but soon she decided to leave London. She was expecting her first child, and later on that year, her daughter

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 106 [author's translation].

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 106 [author's translation].

Elsbeth was born. In 1922 Dora had a son, Hugh, and in the same year, she lost her husband, Herbert Jones, who died following an unsuccessful operation at a London hospital. He was 36. And so Dora was widowed at 32, and had two young children to care for. This was undoubtedly a very hard time for her, but she had great support from her sisters and also from Ruth and Herbert Lewis. With their support and through her own strength of character, she was able to carry on.

Dora moved, with her two children, to live at Aberystwyth, where her sister Gertrude was a lecturer in the Education Department at the University, and eventually she decided to find work to support her family. She found employment at The National Library, reading and deciphering old documents. She stayed at the Library for four years, but Thomas Jones, who was the deputy secretary of the Cabinet at the time, and also an old friend of Dora's family, urged her to take up a post at Gregynog, the Powys mansion which was to become such a centre of culture, as secretary to the renowned Gregynog Press, and as personal secretary to Gwendoline and Margaret Davies, who by now owned Gregynog. In 1927, Dora accepted the post and moved there with her children to Bronbechan, one of the houses on the estate, which became their home. During her time at Gregynog she undoubtedly did invaluable work with the Press and with all of Gregynog's musical, social and cultural activities.

In 1940 came another tragedy to shatter Dora's life. Her daughter Elsbeth was killed when a torpedo hit the ship on which she was travelling home from Australia. She had gone there as an escort to children from south Wales who were shipped over there in order to avoid the bombing which had been expected during the Second World War. Elsbeth was only 21. She was badly wounded, and died on board a German prisoner of war ship in the Pacific Ocean. Also Dora's son Hugh was badly wounded in the battle of Arnhem in 1944, but he survived, and Dora helped to nurse him back to health. After the tragedy of losing her daughter, for a time Dora lost her zest for life. She rarely sang and felt that she could no longer stay at Gregynog, with all its memories and associations. She decided to make a new start in life and began working at the Ministry of Labour offices in Swansea. Later she worked for a short time in Cardiff as an administrator for the government's Training and Further Education Scheme. She then moved back to Swansea as careers officer at the University College there, until her retirement in 1956. During this time she started singing again, apparently persuaded by Tom Pickering, whom she knew from her Gregynog days. He had been a member of the Gregynog choir and was by this time the west Wales representative for the BBC. 'It was he who slowly, gently conjured once more the song from her heart'.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ben Bowen Thomas, *Dora Herbert Jones MBE, 1890 – 1974 – Teyrngeid* (1974), printed leaflet containing an address which was delivered at Dora Herbert Jones' memorial service held at Gregynog, 9 February 1974.

After retiring, she moved back to Gregynog, 'the most beautiful of all places'<sup>9</sup> in Dora's opinion. She lived there in Tŷ Canol with her sister and enjoyed contributing much to the varied cultural activities in Powys as well as further afield. Indeed she was by now a well known, colourful and quite regal character, and it is small wonder that Sioned Penllyn referred to her as 'Brenhines Powys'<sup>10</sup> (Queen of Powys). She lived at Tŷ Canol until she died in 1974.

It was when Dora was a student at The University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, that she first came to the fore as a singer, and, more particularly, as a folk song singer. A folk song society had been established amongst the students at Aberystwyth as early as 1910. Dora became a member, and there are a number of accounts of her singing Welsh folk songs at the College's concerts.<sup>11</sup> Singing in Dr Mary Davies' lecture at the College in 1910 had been a definite turning point for Dora. She was interested in all types of singing, but this particular experience, in Dora's own words, was the start of 'a lifetime's interest and enjoyment in this field',<sup>12</sup> namely the field of Welsh folk song.

Madame Barbier, an acknowledged French musician, and wife of the Professor of French at the College, taught a student quartet of which Dora was a member, together with Gwen Taylor (contralto), Tudor Williams (tenor) and Lewis Knight (bass) and in 1911 Madame Barbier took them to perform at the Sorbonne, Paris. There the quartet sang Welsh folk songs and Dora sang folk song solos. They received much acclaim from the French audiences and very favourable reviews. Lady Herbert Lewis and Mrs T. E. Ellis, another of the Welsh Folk Song Society's staunch members, had also accompanied them there, and Dora, as a soloist, made a great impression on both of them. In a letter addressed to Dr J. Lloyd Williams, the great founder member and mainstay of the Society, Mrs T. E. Ellis mentions 'charmed audiences' and 'enthusiastic applause'.<sup>13</sup>

In 1912, and Dora still a student, she sang with Y Canorion<sup>14</sup> and Powell Edwards<sup>15</sup> in a concert of Welsh folk songs arranged by Ruth Herbert Lewis and Dr Mary Davies for The Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion and in

<sup>9</sup> Dora Herbert Jones, *Y Llwybrau Gynt*, 114 [author's translation].

<sup>10</sup> Sioned Penllyn, 'Dora Herbert Jones', *Y Genhinen*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Winter, 1973 – 4, (Llandysul, 1974), 98-9.

<sup>11</sup> WFM MS.1459, Dora Herbert Jones Collection, no. 419: concert programme, 'University of Wales Musical Club', 7 December 1910.

<sup>12</sup> Dora Herbert Jones, *Y Llwybrau Gynt*, 99 [author's translation].

<sup>13</sup> J.Lloyd Williams, 'The History of The Welsh Folk Song Society', *Journal of The Welsh Folk Song Society*, Vol. 3, no. 2, 1934, (Wrecsam, 1934), 89 – 102, 146 – 157.

<sup>14</sup> Y Canorion: a party of male students from the University College of North Wales who came together, under the leadership of Dr J Lloyd Williams, to collect and perform Welsh traditional folk songs.

<sup>15</sup> Powell Edwards: a popular singer during the first half of the 20th century and a fine renderer of folk songs.

the same year, Dora won first prize in the folk singing competition at the National Eisteddfod in Wrecsam.

At this time, good quality singers were sorely needed by The Welsh Folk Song Society, singers who understood the songs and the way in which they should be sung. In the first few years after The Welsh Folk Song Society was founded, over 500 folk songs had been collected in Wales. This was an important and valuable aspect of the Society's work, but the collecting and the preserving in itself was not enough. The songs now needed to be presented anew to the people of Wales. J. Lloyd Williams was very eager that this should happen, as he said in *The Journal of The Welsh Folk Song Society*:

The other direction in which we long to see greater improvement is in the singing of the melodies by our vocalists. At present there are not more than half a dozen singers who can sing these melodies with sufficient absence of effect and self-consciousness to give the requisite ease and naturalness of effect.<sup>16</sup>

Most timely and fortunately for the Society, this was when Dora Herbert Jones came on the scene. It was in 1912, when Dora was 22 years old, that she first became a member of The Welsh Folk Song Society. The zeal of the Society's early members would have appealed to Dora's enthusiastic and passionate nature, and she had the abilities and the dedication that the Society needed at the time. She sang in the Society's annual meeting nearly every year during the period between 1912 and 1934. Her singing obviously met the Society's high standards, and over a period of about 18 years she was regularly invited to sing by the Society's lecturers. She particularly enjoyed singing in Dr J Lloyd Williams' lectures, and referred to him as 'the greatest pioneer of Welsh folk song'.<sup>17</sup> Dora valued his firm guidance and his total dedication to every aspect of the Society's work, and he was always very eager to have her as a singer in his lectures. She would accompany him to Welsh societies in London and other cities in England. He would send her the songs beforehand and she would practice them by the next lecture. Mary Davies had been impressed with Dora's singing ever since she had sung for her during her lecture at Aberystwyth: 'Your voice was so liquid and mellow and your articulation so clear that not one word was lost and it was something to remember', said Mary Davies of her singing in a letter to Dora in 1915.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> J. Lloyd Williams, *Journal of The Welsh Folk Song Society*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1914, (Wrecsam, 1914), 13.

<sup>17</sup> Dora Herbert Jones, WFM MS.1459, Dora Herbert Jones Collection, no. 251: radio programme script, *Hanes Cymru – Dr J Lloyd Williams*, (BBC (WHS) 7 July 1955), 1 [author's translation].

<sup>18</sup> WFM MS.1459, Dora Herbert Jones Collection, no. 331: letter from Mary Davies to Dora Herbert Jones, 28 April 1915.

Dora also sang in some of Ruth Herbert Lewis's lectures, and she thought that Dora's singing was 'a perfect example of how folk songs should be sung'.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from singing in lectures, Dora also sang in various concerts across the country. In July, 1914, she featured alongside Morfydd Llwyn Owen and Powell Edwards at Notting Hill Gate, London. She also had invitations to sing at the meetings of various societies and establishments, such as The Royal Society of Artists, The Royal Welsh Fusiliers, The Worker's Educational Association and The National Museum of Wales, to name but a few. Dora made recordings of the folk songs for The Gramophone Company, at The Hayes Studios, London, one in 1926 with Charles Clements, Aberystwyth accompanying her on the piano, and one in 1927, with Sir Walford Davies accompanying. By her rendering of the re-discovered folk songs, Dora realised the Society's aims; she presented the songs afresh to a new generation.

It was in 1918 that Dora herself first ventured to lecture on Welsh folk songs. The Welsh Folk Song Society's annual report for 1917-1918, states that she lectured in Waterloo, Dublin, Liverpool and Limerick; and in the 1920 – 1921 report, it states that she gave five lectures in Liverpool, two in Birkenhead and one in Bethesda. Ruth Herbert Lewis mentions that she worked hard at spreading the Society's message among the Women's Institute.<sup>20</sup> During the depression in the 1930s she spent a week in the Rhondda, lecturing and singing there in the unemployed workers' clubs. She was guest lecturer at The Welsh Music Council's summer school in 1938 and 1950, and in the 1960s, she went with the late Frances Môn Jones to give talks to school children in Maldwyn. She continued to lecture for years after that.

In her lectures she emphasized the importance of understanding the background of each folk song before attempting to sing it. She believed that the essence of our way of life as a nation was to be had in the simple melodies and words of these songs.<sup>21</sup> Sioned Penllyn testifies to the way in which Dora could capture and hold the attention of all sorts of audiences: 'She was equally at home on a large stage as at a tiny chapel vestry, among academics as among ordinary folk and was equally at ease with her own generation as in the company of youngsters'.<sup>22</sup>

The fact that Dora could sing as well as lecture made her the obvious choice when the Society had to choose one of its members to represent Wales at The International Conference of Popular Culture, held at Prague in October 1928.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Roberts, 'Y Fonesig Ruth Lewis, Plas Penucha, Caerwys', *Llafar Gwlad*, Vol. 33, 1991, (Llanrwst, 1991), 20-1 [author's translation].

<sup>20</sup> Bangor MS.20405: letter from Ruth Herbert Lewis to Mai Roberts, 23 July 1930.

<sup>21</sup> A collection of some of Dora Herbert Jones' lectures is to be found at The Welsh Folk Museum, St. Fagan (WFM MS.1459)

<sup>22</sup> Sioned Penllyn, 'Dora Herbert Jones', 98 – 9 [author's translation].

Dora took part by lecturing and singing, and had the opportunity to listen to the various representatives from over 40 different countries. She made the participants aware of the rich musical culture of Wales, and she felt that it was an eye opener for the English representatives in particular. In her words: 'I felt that it was the English who were most surprised while listening to our treasures. I think they thought that our musical heritage could be summed up in *Gwŷr Harlech* and *Ar hyd y nos*'.<sup>23</sup>

Following her visit to Prague, and the opportunity she had had to sample other countries' musical heritage, she would often lecture on these songs from other countries and sang them. She had several invitations to lecture and sing in England, and eventually brought the Welsh folk songs to Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst's notice. In 1929 she lectured and sang for The English Folk Dance and Song Society at The Friend's House in London, with Vaughan Williams presiding. Dora certainly made an impact on him, as we can hear from his opinion of the evening: '...delightful from beginning to end. Beautiful songs beautifully sung and a lecture in which sound knowledge was fired by passionate enthusiasm'.<sup>24</sup>

One significant difference between Dora and some of the other lecturers within the Society, like Mary Davies, Grace Gwyneddon Davies and Ruth Herbert Lewis for example, was the fact that they spoke very little Welsh, whereas Welsh was of course Dora's first language, therefore she could communicate all the more directly with Welsh audiences. However, she was equally proficient in both Welsh and English, and her command of both languages was impressive. As well as being knowledgeable she was a witty and entertaining speaker. Through her lectures and her notable singing, Dora contributed most effectively over many years to this aspect of the Society's work.

A major part of The Welsh Folk Song Society's work was of course the collecting of folk songs. Even though collecting was not one of Dora's main contributions, yet she did some valuable work in this respect. She wasn't an important collector, as she was the first to admit, but she was with some of the important collectors and regularly assisted them with their work. During her time in London she had of course become very well acquainted with one of the most important collectors of the time – Lady Ruth Herbert Lewis. She accompanied her and Mrs Tom Ellis on that well documented trip to collect songs in the workhouse at Holywell in 1911–1912. They collected a great number of songs there from eighty-year old Jane Williams. Amongst these were well known songs such as *Lliw Gwyn Rhosyn yr Haf*, *Y Bachgen Main*,

<sup>23</sup> Dora Herbert Jones, *Y Llwybrau Gynt*, 110 – 11 [author's translation].

<sup>24</sup> Alan Gibbs, 'Holst and Gregynog', *The Music Review*, Vol. 55, No. 1, February, 1994, (Cambridge, 1994), 23 – 36. Cf. his article on the same subject in *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*. 2003, n.s. vol. 10 (2004), 168–171.

*Y Mab Afradlon* and *Mynwent Eglwys*, this last song becoming one of Dora's favourites. Dora, as a fluent Welsh speaker, must have been a great help in the collecting. In one of her lectures she gives us an indication of how exactly they used to collect the songs from the old people: 'We used to record on the cylinder, not discs like we have today, and we would write down in a notebook – usually in sol-ffa, - the melody and the words, and we would take note of the style of singing as well'.<sup>25</sup>

She remembers the shocked reaction of some of the old people when they heard their own voices for the first time coming out of the cylinder, and she also remembers that some of them seemed ashamed of the old songs. In her own words:

It seems ludicrous now to recall the scepticism, often the outright hostility, and the black ignorance encountered in our travels...But there were enlightened folk who would tell us of a singer here and there and we hastened to the spot to see what luck we would have.<sup>26</sup>

Dora herself preserved one beautiful melody. It was first noted by the German Johann Malchair who heard it when he visited Harlech at the beginning of the nineteenth century. His friend, the musician Dr Crotch, published the melody in 1807 but Llew Tegid rediscovered it about a century later, hand-written in a booklet which he bought at Bangor market. This notebook had belonged to Johann Malchair. Somehow or other the tune came to Dora's possession. She showed it to the late John Roberts Williams and he asked Lady Amy Parry Williams and Sir T H Parry Williams to write words to fit the melody, and so was born that beautiful song *Beth yw'r Haf i mi?* – creating a perfect match between words and music.

Dora also served the Society in a secretarial and administrative capacity. Over the years she held various positions – as secretary, treasurer and president. She was in fact still president when she died in 1974.

Without doubt, one of Dora's main contributions was her pioneering work in the field of radio and television. She was one of the earliest broadcasters and was one of the first to broadcast about Welsh music in the Welsh language. There is evidence that she broadcasted as early as 1927 – when she sang Welsh folk songs,<sup>27</sup> and this was only four years after the British

<sup>25</sup> WFM MS.1459, Dora Herbert Jones Collection, no. 261: radio programme script, *Materion y Dydd – Cymru Heddiw 4, Caneuon Gwerin Cymru*, (BBC, 14 October 1959) [author's translation].

<sup>26</sup> Jones, Dora Herbert, *Greetings – Cyfarchion*, the Welsh Folk Song Society's 50th anniversary celebration programme, 1958, (Liverpool, 1958), 9.

<sup>27</sup> NLW MS.J Lloyd Williams Collection, 112: letter from J. Lloyd Williams to Dora Herbert Jones, 13 October 1927; letter from Dora Herbert Jones to J. Lloyd Williams, 15 October 1927.

Broadcasting Company began public broadcasting in Wales for the first time in February 1923, and only five years after any public broadcasting of any kind had begun in Britain. Welsh language broadcasts were very thin on the ground at this time, and Welsh speakers who took any interest in broadcasting were very scarce.

There is proof that Dora broadcasted 54 times between 1927 and 1965, from either Cardiff, Bangor or Swansea studios, and she also took part in some outside broadcasts.<sup>28</sup> Most of these programmes were in Welsh, but some were in English. She appeared on television for the first time in 1960. The last time she appeared on television was in 1969, in a programme about Gregynog, when she was nearly 80 years old.

From the very beginning, Dora was adamant that she would master the art of broadcasting. This was the perfect medium for one that was, in her son Hugh's words, 'at her best in the oral mode'.<sup>29</sup> As one admirer said to her in a letter: 'You are a radio personality, proper',<sup>30</sup> and judging from the number of letters of appreciation she received, it was certainly true.

Her radio and television programmes can be roughly divided into four categories, the first being programmes featuring recitals of Welsh folk songs. Dora took part in a number of programmes of this sort, mostly between 1927 and 1939, broadcasting from the BBC studios in Cardiff. She had a wide *repertoire* of songs, and in a concert which was broadcasted from Bangor she sang as many as 13 of them. Sometimes she would sing to the accompaniment of the piano and at other times unaccompanied. Amongst her favourite folk songs were *Tros y Môr* and *Hiraeth*, two sad, nostalgic songs which she could no doubt relate to considering her tragic losses over the years. *Hiraeth* was a particular favourite of hers, and she would often sing it to finish her recitals.

She received much praise for these radio recitals. J. Lloyd Williams considered her singing to be of a very high standard, and writes in *The Journal of The Welsh Folk Song Society*:

The radio broadcasting of our folk songs is unsatisfactory to say the least. Only a few broadcasts have been heard during the course of the year, and the singing was not of a very high standard. However the singing of Mrs Herbert Jones was exceedingly good.<sup>31</sup>

Her singing drew the attention of the national press. Here are Joyce Grenfell's comments in *The Observer*, 1939:

<sup>28</sup> WFM MS.1459, Dora Herbert Jones Collection, no. 214 – 72: various scripts of radio and television programmes.

<sup>29</sup> Personal correspondence between Hugh Herbert Jones and the author, 31 January 2000.

<sup>30</sup> WFM MS.1459, Dora Herbert Jones Collection, no. 324: letter from Nansi Young to Dora Herbert Jones, 14 April 1954.

<sup>31</sup> *The Welsh Folk Song Society Annual Report 1931 -2*, (Wrecsam, 1932), 6.

Tuesday used to be the dull day in the radio week, but it can no longer claim that poor distinction. Last week gave us two very charming and out of the ordinary song recitals: by Dora Herbert Jones and Harry Vanoss (a Dutchman)... The Welsh songs stood out from a first-rate programme. Mrs Herbert Jones knows exactly how these simple songs should be sung.<sup>32</sup>

Dora relished the fact that she was now able to reach a wider audience than ever before, and could lay before them their folk song heritage. In her singing she set a high standard which combined musical artistry and sincere simplicity, and such standard was very much needed at the time.

Secondly, Dora undertook several programmes written, produced and presented by herself in which she discussed Welsh folk songs, their background and history and the way in which she thought they should be sung. Amongst these programmes was *Tros y Garreg*, broadcasted in 1951, and a series called *Trysor o Gân*, broadcasted in 1956.

Amongst her most successful programmes were the ones she broadcasted especially for school children. In 1934 she was invited to write and present a series of five programmes for schools under the title *Alawon Gwerin Cymru* (Folk Songs of Wales). The other writers in the series were Professor D.E. Parry Williams and Irene Myrddin Davies. In these programmes Dora successfully dealt with some quite difficult subjects for children to understand, such as the musical modes of the songs, and the speech rhythm which is sometimes evident in the folk songs. She explained how those who say that all Welsh music is either in the major or minor modes are mistaken, and goes on to point out how many of the Welsh folk songs are in the ancient 'ray' mode. She aimed to nurture in the children respect towards their musical heritage.

Lastly were Dora's programmes on the early folk song collectors. One of the most successful series was in the English language, and called *They Found the Songs*. The programmes were written and presented by her in 1954, following a request by Mansel Thomas, Head of the Music Department at the BBC at the time. There were seven half hour programmes in the series, portraying the main collectors of Welsh folk songs – Maria Jane Williams, Dr J Lloyd Williams, Dr Mary Davies, Grace Gwynedd Davies, Lady Ruth Herbert Lewis and Phillip Thomas.

These were vivid portrayals, and Dora's own personal acquaintance with most of them gave an extra credibility to it all. These programmes are an invaluable contribution to the history of Welsh music, particularly as Dora gives us her own personal recollections of most of these extraordinary personalities. The writing is full of skilful touches of humour, and includes amusing anecdotes; for example, her reference to one of the old singers who seemed to

<sup>32</sup> WFM MS.1459, Dora Herbert Jones Collection, no. 374: newspaper cutting, *The Observer*, 12 February 1939.



view the phonograph as a 'new fangled instrument of torture',<sup>33</sup> and another old fellow who shouted in amazement when he heard his own voice coming out of the machine, 'Good God! It says the words as well!', and Dora added 'I leave you to imagine what the old boy really expected the machine to do!'.<sup>34</sup>

Dora received a very positive response from the listeners, including relatives and close friends of the collectors she portrayed. Kitty Idwal Jones said of Dora's portrayal of her mother, Ruth Herbert Lewis:

I simply must tell you how enormously we have all enjoyed the series...the singing was delightful, and you gave the most vivid picture of mother. The artistic effect of the programme was remarkable. In listening to the series, I have been greatly impressed by the skill with which you have chosen the songs, the instruments, the singers and the material...We would like the series repeated...It's the best thing I've heard for a very long time.<sup>35</sup>

Lady Enid Parry said of her portrayal of Maria Jane Williams, – 'Excellent. Every word of true interest and your happy way of presenting it all really enthralled me'.<sup>36</sup> '...I hear that Mansel Thomas was very pleased indeed with the series – I hope they will soon be broadcasted again'.<sup>37</sup> *The Western Mail* declared it a 'valuable series which made many listeners aware for the first time of the wealth of their national inheritance in folk music'.<sup>38</sup>

Even though a great number of Dora's programmes, from the 1950s onwards, were recorded, most unfortunately only a very few of these recordings have been preserved and are still available today, but a number of the scripts of her programmes are in safe keeping in the archive at the Museum of Welsh Life, St. Fagan. There are also some typed scripts there of Dora's programmes dating back to as early as 1934, before the practice of recording broadcasts had begun at all. These again are important and rare evidence pertaining to the history of Welsh music.

Dora did in fact spend 15 years of her working life (plus a further 18 years of retirement) at the beautiful but isolated Gregynog estate in the depths of

<sup>33</sup> Dora Herbert Jones, WFM MS.1459, Dora Herbert Jones Collection, no. 248: radio programme script, *They Found the Songs* (5), (BBC, 24 May 1954), 3.

<sup>34</sup> Dora Herbert Jones, WFM MS. 1459, Dora Herbert Jones Collection, no. 247: radio programme script, *They Found the Songs* (4), (BBC, 10 May 1954), 3 – 4.

<sup>35</sup> WFM MS.1459, Dora Herbert Jones Collection, no. 307: letter from Kitty Idwal Jones to Dora Herbert Jones, 28 June 1954.

<sup>36</sup> WFM MS.1459, Dora Herbert Jones Collection, no. 314: letter from Enid Parry to Dora Herbert Jones, 30 March 1954 [Author's translation].

<sup>37</sup> WFM MS.1459, Dora Herbert Jones Collection, no. 314a: letter from Enid Parry to Dora Herbert Jones, 1 August 1954 [Author's translation].

<sup>38</sup> WFM MS.1459, Dora Herbert Jones Collection, no. 394: newspaper cutting, *The Western Mail*, 28 June 1954.

rural Wales, and during this time she made no small contribution to the musical and varied cultural activities held at the mansion, particularly during the annual Gregynog Festival. One of the first things Dora did after starting to work full time at Gregynog in 1927 was to form a choir there composed of the staff members and their families, and some others from the surrounding local area. There was a strong connection at this time between Gregynog and Sir Walford Davies – chairman of the newly formed Welsh Music Council, and newly appointed Professor of Music at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. Gwendoline and Margaret Davies gave generous financial sponsorship towards the developments of music in general at the University of Wales, and Sir Walford Davies was eager to strengthen this bond between Gregynog and the University by using the mansion as a centre for concerts and musical activities in general. Therefore, the choir was formed out of the combined enthusiasm of Walford Davies, the two sisters and Dora, and much use was made of Dora's ability as a soloist. The choir held an annual concert every year between 1929 and 1932 and musicians such as Elsie Suddaby and Mary Jarred would come to Gregynog to perform with the choir and renowned composers such as Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst would often be invited to take part as guest conductors. The choir's *repertoire* was mainly classical, with works like the Brahms *Requiem* and Bach's *St Mathew's Passion* often being performed. Even though the main emphasis was on English and European works, Dora tried her best to introduce some Welsh music.

The Gregynog Festival was held every May. This was a four day festival in which Dora played a prominent part, and it was held annually between 1933 and 1938. Dora was responsible for arranging the festival programme and the Sunday services. The whole of the Gregynog Festival could be described as classical, highbrow and very English. Dora tried to make it more relevant to Wales; for example, in the 1933 festival she arranged a short concert under the title 'Wales, her History and Folk Music', in which she herself sang Welsh folk songs. She was responsible for inviting Keith Faulkner, from the English Folk Dance and Song Society, to Gregynog. She was also very eager to give young Welsh performers and composers a chance, and managed to arrange for Arwel Hughes to take part in the Festival in 1938. A concert was arranged featuring a performance of his Welsh folk songs arranged for piano, viola and cello. So Dora introduced a Welsh element to the festival in spite of quite negative attitudes very often, at a time when Welsh music was generally regarded as being inferior.

It was whilst she was at Gregynog that Dora came to contact with two of the most acclaimed classical composers in England at the time – Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst. Gwendoline Davies had been eager for some time to ask Vaughan Williams if he would arrange some Welsh folk songs especially for the Gregynog choir. Dora certainly had something to do



with this, and it was she in the end who managed to persuade Adrian Boult to write a letter to the composer with this request. At the time Vaughan Williams was in the middle of composing *Job*, but he suggested directing the matter to his friend, Gustav Holst. Holst had not arranged any folk songs for fifteen years, and to begin with he was not much taken with the idea, but he agreed to listen to Dora singing some of the songs. So in the summer of 1930, Dora went to London, to St Paul's school in Hammersmith, where Holst taught music, to perform to him some of the Welsh folk songs. When Holst heard Dora's singing he decided at once that he would begin working on the arrangements. She had made a great impact on him, and he asked her to address the whole school on the subject of folk singing – which she did – for an hour and a half apparently. He begged her not to take singing lessons from anyone without consulting him first, and invited her to teach folk song singing in London.

Holst arranged 12 Welsh folk songs, all of them, apart from one, arranged for a mixed choir. Some of the songs had been favourites in Dora's *repertoire* for years – songs like *Mae Nghariad i'n Fenws* and *Adar Mân y Mynydd*, and eight of them were songs collected by J. Lloyd Williams. *Lisa Lân* was Holst's favourite. Dora worked closely with Holst on these arrangements, and was a great help in giving the composer the background and history to the songs. She loosely translated the words, so that Steuart Wilson could compose the English versions. When the songs were first published by

Curwen in 1932, they were very popular, although Dora said of them: 'They're never less than interesting. They're never dull...but they don't always come off'.<sup>39</sup> She preferred Vaughan Williams's folk songs arrangements, and in 1932, he also came under the spell of her singing when she was invited to his home in Dorking. She had to sing the Welsh folk song *Tros y Môr* 14 times for him, and he subsequently arranged the song especially for the choir at Gregynog.

By bringing these songs to the attention of composers such as Holst and Vaughan Williams, Dora's aim was to present the music of Wales to the world's attention, and to give it the high profile she felt it deserved – as she told Madeau Stewart in a radio interview – 'I was very anxious, you know, that we should stand four squared to all countries'.<sup>40</sup>

When Dora left Gregynog in 1942, although she and Gwendoline Davies had certainly had their differences, Gwendoline said of her, 'She is vital to me in so many ways, as our minds work together'... 'Dora, with whom I planned and made Gregynog, and all it has meant in the life of Wales'.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Dora Herbert Jones, Notes by Dr Meredydd Evans of a radio programme, library tapes 26592 – 3, (BBC, 1961). Dora Herbert Jones in conversation with Madeau Stewart.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>41</sup> Dorothy Harrop, *A History of the Gregynog Press*, (Middlesex, 1980), 174 – 5.

Dora Herbert Jones was undoubtedly a strong and influential character who made a significant contribution to music in Wales and in particular to the Welsh folk song scene. She continued to work with the Welsh Folk Song Society until her death in 1974. She was a direct link with the by then almost legendary founder members and never really lost the infectious enthusiasm of those early days, and she was able to convey this enthusiasm to her own generation. She was acutely aware that she was preserving and passing on a precious tradition. She really treasured the simple Welsh folk songs. She found in them '...true, sincere expression of human feeling and imagination', and of their composers she says: 'they knew both sorrow and joy as we do, and could express them as few can today...'<sup>42</sup> and she adds – this written within a year of her retirement – 'I still find them as fresh and fascinating as though I had only just discovered them'.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Jones, Dora Herbert: WFM MS.1459, Casgliad Dora Herbert Jones, no. 250: radio programme script, *They Found the Songs* (7), (BBC, 21 June 1954), 4, 10.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.