

The Best of Welsh Folk Music Opens the North American Festival of Wales

On their first visit to North America, the Welsh Folk group Mabon will present the opening concert of the North American Festival of Wales (NAFOW) on Thursday evening, August 28. Exciting and energetic, Mabon will undoubtedly get the festival off to a rousing start !

Regarded as one of Wales' finest folk performance and dance bands, Mabon includes four very talented musicians: leader Derek Smith, acoustic guitar; Iolo Whelan, percussion and low whistle; Jamie Smith, accordion; and Gareth Whelan, fiddle. These superb musicians form a very energetic Celtic band that thrills – and exhausts – audiences at concerts, dances and on festival stages.

They regularly play at European and British Celtic festivals, and on many occasions have been supported by the Welsh Assembly as official ambassadors of Welsh folk music. Mabon recently performed at the Wales World Nation pavilion at the Festival Interceltique de Lorient in France.

Their music style is to take traditional tunes from across the Celtic countries and rearrange, with a vibrant and innovative approach (Mabonized as it is called by the group). Couple these with original compositions, written by accordionist Jamie Smith, and any Mabon program displays wonderfully fresh directions in the Celtic music genre.

In addition to their Festival opening concert, Mabon will also direct the dancing at the Saturday morning dance workshop, so bring along your dancing shoes and be prepared for at least an hour of exhilarating dancing and exercise to the best *twmpath* dance group in Wales!

Opening Ceremonies at the North American Festival of Wales

To kick off the North American Festival of Wales celebrations, there will be an outdoor opening ceremony at the Richmond City Hall on Thursday afternoon, August 28. The Richmond City Hall, a new and striking building, is about a five-minute walk from the Richmond Inn & Convention Center, our headquarters hotel, through the Richmond shopping mall complex (or a little further through the streets). It is an ideal location for a welcoming ceremony, rain or shine – we are not expecting inclement weather, but if by some fluke of nature it should rain, the ceremony will take place in the City Hall atrium.

After the official city welcome by the Mayor of Richmond, Malcolm Brodie, there will be music and dance, featuring the Vancouver Welsh Men's Choir (who will have just returned from a tour of Russia), the Vancouver Welsh Dancers, the Cambrian Circle women's choral ensemble from the Vancouver Welsh Society, and the Welsh folk group Mabon (see accompanying article). We have timed the start of the program to coincide with the end of the Skyscrapers and Tall Trees Tour, and the opening ceremony will end in time for those registered for the West Coast Salmon Barbecue to walk back to the hotel for that special meal.

To start the Thursday evening entertainment, there will be a second short opening ceremony at the hotel, at which the Festival Flag will be unfurled and welcomes made by the British Consulate general in Vancouver, James Rawlinson, the President of the WNGGA, Lynn Owens Whalen; and Chairman of the Festival of Wales, Richmond, Alan Upshall. There may also be a few surprise welcomes from other honored guests.

Immediately following this ceremony our rousing opening folk music concert by Mabon will set your toes tapping and set the tone for the busy and stimulating Festival weekend!

“Poems and Pints” – A Noson Lawen By a Different Name

Two beloved traditions at our National Gymanfa Ganu weekends have been passed down through the years – the informal hymn-singing and a noson lawen. Just because the National has changed its name to the North American Festival of Wales does not mean that these traditions are lost!

Every evening at the Richmond Festival there will be a director and piano in our host hotel for a rousing hymn sing. There are no hotel time limits as to when we finish, and we hope that, as in previous years, the informal hymn singing will form a rousing and memorable part of the weekend. We already have four directors signed up to make sure that the hwyl and hiraeth of the occasion will not be lost.

The planning team decided this year to try something different with respect to our informal noson lawen entertainment. Instead of opening the Festival with a noson lawen, which in recent years has become nothing more than a concert, we wanted to restore the true basis of a noson lawen – relaxed and informal free entertainment, moderated by a host but not controlled by a performance setting.

We have called this “Poems and Pints,” modeled on a very successful BBC Wales series of many years ago.

“Poems and Pints” will take place at the hotel on Thursday night after the Mabon concert and on Friday night following the “after banquet” entertainment. The host on both occasions will be David Lintern of Victoria, B.C., who is very well known in the region both as a noson lawen host and for his collection of funny stories.

There are no tickets to buy – just turn up and enjoy the fun and atmosphere. To help the informality, we have invited along members of the Vancouver Orpheus Choir, itself a product of the Welsh Society of Vancouver. The choir will not be giving a concert, but they have a great reputation for very entertaining after-concert “relaxations.”

What all this means, of course, is that you can split your late evening time between the informal hymn-singing and the “Poems and Pints” to get the best of both worlds!