

Everybody Sings as Welsh Groups Stage Festival



Members of the audience help to fill the air with a concert by choral groups who are in Philadelphia during the National Welsh Song Festival of the U. S.

at the Strawbridge & Clothier store auditorium during the 23d annual song festival of the National Welsh Song Festival of the U. S.

The Philadelphia Scene By Ruth Seltzer

1954

THE TALK WAS OF GYMANFA GANU, as I spoke to Thomas E. Rees, who is president of the Philadelphia Gymanfa Ganu Association which is sponsoring the national Gymanfa Ganu to be held the weekend after next at Convention Hall.

Gymanfa Ganu is pronounced guh-man-va gan-ee and it is a Welsh song festival. A mighty big festival it will be, too, bringing 10,000 Welsh descendants to this town of ours.

Consonants may be swallowed at this gathering of the



DISCUSSING WELSH SONG FESTIVAL—Mrs. Alexander Kerr, of Lansdowne, in the costume of her native Wales, talks to Thomas E. Rees, president of the sponsoring Philadelphia Gymanfa Ganu Association.

Cymry (Welsh)—but not tears. Welsh singing, Rees says, is so heartfelt that people will cry in satisfaction.

"It's amazing," Thomas Rees declares, "but you'll see tears rolling from their cheeks." They will be quiet, unwiped tears. The songs will be in Welsh and English—rendered by noted soloists, a trained choir and by the audience itself joining in the

plaintive call, the chant, the prayer.

Rees lives in Germantown. A native Philadelphian, both his parents were born in Wales. He has crossed the ocean ten times to the Pumsaint (Valley of the Five Saints) to learn more about himself and his Welsh origin. He says the Welsh have a good, courageous heritage—song is a part of it—that can lend itself to a better U. S.

Getting ready for the song festival has been a colossal task. Although this area has a longer Welsh history than any other in America, the festival—to be held Sept. 3, 4 and 5—will be the first national Gymanfa Ganu ever to be held in Philadelphia.

Even before William Penn came to these shores, the Welsh lived in caves in the port of Burlington, N. J. The Welsh barony, purchased by a group of Welshmen in 1681, extended from West Philadelphia out to Paoli and down to West Chester. Many from the old barony country will take part in the Gymanfa as will Welsh descendants from Gwynedd, Penllyn and more distant parts of the globe.

Mrs. Alexander Kerr, of Lansdowne, wouldn't think of missing the song festival. She was born in Wales 87 years ago and came to America when she was 19. Mrs. Kerr has been to many small Gymanfas but this will be her first big one. She traveled to center-city by street car for our pre-Gymanfa talk. When she arrived, she donned a bright red cape, a high-silk hat, silver buckles and a black and gold wool skirt.

"Don't you think it's grand?" asked Mrs. Kerr as she pointed to the skirt. She confided that the skirt was her very best petticoat when she set sail for the U. S. "The wool was sheared off sheep from my parents' farm."

"The town nearest our farm," Mrs. Kerr said, "is the town that is the longest known word in the world." Take a deep breath. It is Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgerychwyrndrobwillgerdyslliogogoch. It means Church of St. Mary of the White Hazel Pool near the Rapid Whirlpool of the Red Cane.

Fortunately, noted Mrs. Kerr, the abbreviated postoffice address is Llanfair, P. G.

Edward F. James, treasurer of Philadelphia Gymanfa, walked in while Mrs. Kerr was talking. "You look well in that high hat," said James to the octogenarian. Mrs. Kerr, a twinkle in her eye, answered, "My grandmother wore one."

They'll be coming by train, bus and plane—men, women and children—to sing the beautiful hymns and songs of the Cymry, in Welsh and English.

Those who still speak the tongue of their ancient forebears will greet each other with a "Sut i chi"—which means, "how are you?"

Thomas Rees says everybody is invited to the Gymanfa Ganu. A good sing, he declares, and a good cry will gladden the hearts of Welsh descendants and non-Welsh alike. Tyma i eich iechyd—here's to your health!

Fresh Lunch—Old Dinner

AROUND THE TABLE at a recent luncheon in New Hope sat many "regulars" of the Bucks County colony. The women who came to lunch talked mostly about "The Man Who Came to Dinner." Although "The Man Who" was written 15 years ago by two of the county's favorite playwrights, George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, the "Dinner" was still as fresh as the latest baking in New Hope conversation.

10,000 to Attend Welsh Songfest

Philadelphia

Some 10,000 music-loving Welsh descendants from many parts of the world are scheduled to gather in Philadelphia Sept. 3, 4 and 5 to participate in the 23d national Gymanfa Ganu, a Welsh festival of song.

Since Philadelphia numbers many Welsh chimes and descendants, including some of the first settlers in this country in the 1600s, many groups are expected to arrive here prior to the festival opening to participate in pilgrimages to historic Welsh sites, many on the Main Line.

Thomas E. Rees, of 512 W. Coulter st., is president of the sponsoring Philadelphia Gymanfa Ganu Association. The songfest will be held at Convention Hall and marks the first time that the national Gymanfa Ganu has been held here.

Former U. S. Supreme Court Justice Owen J. Roberts has been named honorary president for the event. Honorary vice presidents, all of whom are expected to participate, include Sen. James H. Duff, former Ambassador Joseph E. Davies, of Washington, and Frank E. Gannett, New York State publisher.

Benjamin F. Fairless, chairman of the board of U. S. Steel Corp., a Welsh descendant, also will attend.

Gymanfa Ganu will be directed by E. J. Hughes, of Caernarvon, North Wales. Other participants will include C. Wilton Davies, dean of St. David's Cathedral, St. David's, Wales, and Dr. Elfan Rees, of Geneva, Switzerland, a consultant to the United Nations.

Welsh Singers Will Open Big Festival Here Saturday

The 23d annual song festival of the National Gymanfa Ganu Association of the United States and Canada, the yearly gathering of world famous Welsh singing groups, will open in Convention Hall next Saturday evening.

Some 10,000 persons of Welsh descent from Greater Philadelphia, as well as visitors from Canada and Wales are expected to attend the festivities, officials estimated yesterday.

"We are certain this year will be the greatest in the history of the association," Thomas E. Rees, president of the Philadelphia Gymanfa Ganu Association, declared yesterday.

The principal events on the program, to be held in Convention Hall, are open free to the public, Rees said.

Public Invited

"The greatest emphasis will be placed on general public participation in the festivities," he explained.

The main opening event will get under way at Convention Hall at 8 P. M. Saturday. It will be followed by a reception at the association's festival headquarters in the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel. This program will consist solely of secular music, including two renditions by the Philadelphia group, conducted by Gustva Rosser. The organization consists of 75 mixed voices.

Programs in Convention Hall on Sunday at 2 P. M. and at 7.30 P. M. will be devoted to sacred music, portions of which will be presented by the 300-voice Gymanfa Ganu Choir, a singing group comprising trained singers from Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, New Castle, Del., Youngstown, O., and other centers of Welsh population.

Services Planned

The singers will make a pre-festival opening appearance in the Strawbridge and Clothier auditorium Saturday morning at 11 A. M. under the direction of E. J. Hughes, fellow of the Royal College of Organists, of Caernarvon, North Wales, who will also conduct the main Convention Hall programs.

Special services in English at the First Presbyterian Church, 21st and Walnut sts., and in Welsh at the Girard Avenue Welsh Presbyterian Church, 1617 W. Girard av., will be held on Sunday at 10 A. M.

In the English service, Dr. Elfan Rees, adviser on refugee affairs to the World Council of Churches will be the preacher, while the Rev. C. Witton-Davies, dean of St. David's Cathedral, St. David's, Wales, will be moderator.

At Girard av., the Rev. T. Davies, Ammonford, Wales, will be the preacher, with Dr. R. L. Jones as moderator.