

Instrumental Music in Medieval Wales

Sally Harper, University of Wales, Bangor

Sally Harper is a Lecturer in the School of Music at the University of Wales, Bangor .

A late medieval manor house by the River Tamar on the Cornish border contains a remarkable testimony of a uniquely Welsh art-form.¹ The early sixteenth-century Cothele “tester,” once a cupboard front, comprises a series of carved oak panels arranged around a central inscription bearing the name of one Harri ap Gr[uffudd].² The upper right panel depicts two musicians in courtly attire. The first holds in his left hand a rectangular crwth with a flat bridge (an instrument by then almost obsolete in England); his right hand, now missing, held the bow. His colleague has a small triangular harp with a curved neck. The carving is damaged and its detail only approximate: the Welsh crwth at that period usually had six strings rather than five, and the harp between 25 and 30 rather than 15 strings.³ Nevertheless, it captures a quintessentially Welsh scene, a form of music-making known to the Welsh as *cerdd dant*, or the art of the string.⁴ This was music of high cultural status, a natural partner to the equally elevated poetic form of *cerdd dafod* (“the art of the tongue”) that it complemented and sometimes accompanied. Craftsmen within both areas were honored as *gwŷr wrth gerdd*, literally, “men at their art.”

The carving most likely found its way to Cornwall when Catherine St John of Bletsoe, the widow of Sir Griffith ap Rhys (d.1521), married her second husband, Sir Piers Edgcumbe of Cothele.⁵ Their “homecoming” in 1524–5 was

¹ An abbreviated Welsh-language version of the present article appears as “*Datblygiad Cerdd Dant yng Nghymru yn yr Oesoedd Canol*” (The Development of *Cerdd Dant* in Wales in the Middle Ages), in the yearbook *Cof Cenedl* (2004, forthcoming). I am grateful to the editor for allowing publication of this revised English version.

² The musicians are shown in Osian Elis, *The Story of the Harp in Wales* (Cardiff, 1991), 14, and in D. R. Saer, *The Harp in Wales in Pictures* (Cardiff, 1991), no. 7. A reproduction of the complete tester appears in Peter Lord, *The Visual Culture of Wales: Imaging the Nation* (CD-ROM, University of Wales, 2002).

³ For useful short accounts of both instruments, see Bethan Miles and Robert Evans, “Crwth,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2nd edn., London, 2001), vi, 747–53, and Joan Rimmer/ Robert Evans and Bill Taylor, “Harp,” V, 1–2, *ibid.*, x, 896–900.

⁴ Some of the most important studies of the musical features of *cerdd dant* include Peter Crossley-Holland, “Secular Homophonic Music in Wales in the Middle Ages,” *Music and Letters*, 23 (1942), 135–62; Thurston Dart, “Robert ap Huw’s Manuscript of Welsh Harp Music (c. 1613),” *Galpin Society Journal*, 21 (1974), 52–65; and Osian Elis, *The Story of the Harp in Wales*. A more recent collection of essays appears in *Robert ap Huw Studies*, ed. Sally Harper, *Welsh Music History*, 3 (1999).

⁵ Ralph A. Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas and his Family: A Study in the Wars of the Roses and Early Tudor Politics* (Cardiff, 1993), 78–9.

celebrated with a gift of three gallons of wine from the citizens of Plymouth. Catherine took with her to Cothele “all the plate in her keeping which was Sir Griffin Rice’s ... with all her apparel and stuff of household left by him.”⁶ Sir Gruffudd, a knight of the bath to Prince Arthur, was the son of Henry Tudor’s ally, Sir Rhys ap Thomas (1449–1525), chamberlain and justiciar of South Wales. As one of the great patrons of the early sixteenth century, Sir Rhys was a desirable father-in-law. He financed substantial building activity in south west Wales, and the Cothele panels are in similar style to several fine pieces of furniture associated with the family.⁷ His home at Carew Castle in Pembrokeshire was a haven for poets: his own family poet, Rhys Nanmor, compared it to King Arthur’s palace.⁸ A great tournament at Carew in 1506, commemorating Rhys’s admission to the Order of the Garter the previous year, must have attracted numerous Welsh musicians and poets to entertain the thousand people who allegedly attended, and it was perhaps for this event that the oak cupboard was made. An early account of the Carew festivities mentions that “the bardes and prydydds [poets] accompanied by the harp, sung manie a song in commemoration of the vertues and famous achievements of those gentlemen’s ancestors there present.”⁹ This was the ideal environment for *y ddwy[s]gerdd* – the twin arts of music and poetry – to flourish and be understood.

The Cothele musicians, representatives of a period when Welsh instrumental music was at its height, offer a vivid visual image as a starting point. But when did *cerdd dant* first emerge, and what were the precedents for music of high status in medieval Wales? Who performed it, and how? This article traces the context for such music in Wales from its early manifestation in the Laws of Hywel Dda (d. 949/50) to its eventual disappearance in the seventeenth century. There are three potential pitfalls in piecing together its history. First, it is impossible to construct a neat organic chronology of early Welsh music, given the paucity and random nature of the evidence. There are often very considerable gaps between sources, and accounts of events or practices were often written down for the first time only centuries after their actual occurrence. Second, *cerdd dant* was essentially an aurally-transmitted music, and no notation seems to have been devised for it until the sixteenth century. This accounts for the frustrating dearth of musical sources,¹⁰ and also

⁶ N. H. Nicolas (ed.), *Testamenta Vetusta* (London, 2 vols., 1826), II, 645–50, cited in Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas*, 79.

⁷ See Richard Bebb, “Carved Oak Furniture from Tudor Wales,” *Regional Furniture*, 6 (1992), 63–73.

⁸ See “Carew Castle,” *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, ed. Meic Stephens (Cardiff, 1998), 91.

⁹ R. Fenton, *A Historical Tour through Pembrokeshire* (London, 1811), 253–67, cited in Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas*, 273–82 (277).

¹⁰ Just one contemporary notated source survives, *BL MS Add. 14905*, “The Robert ap Huw Manuscript,” published in facsimile as *Musica neu Beroriaeth: BM Additional MS 14905*, with preface by Henry Lewis (Cardiff, 1936), and *Musica: Llawysgrif Robert ap Huw*, with preface by Wyn Thomas (Godstone, 1982).

means that there was no such thing as a reliable *Urtext*. Third, the related forms of instrumental music discussed below move through a series of very different environments, together spanning at least 500 years. Each environment offered its own very particular courtly, social, economic, political and demographic characteristics, and the function and nature of its music inevitably changed in accordance.

The chivalric festivities at Carew Castle in 1506 must have remained long in the common memory, but the most significant landmark for *cerdd dant* during the Tudor period was an eisteddfod held at Caerwys, Flintshire, in 1523.¹¹ Thirteen musicians, named in the manuscript National Library of Wales (hereafter NLW) MS Peniarth 155, graduated at various levels on harp or crwth.¹² Dai Nanklyn was overall winner of the prized silver harp (*ariandlws telyn*); he was also appointed to the highest bardic category of *athro* (teacher or professor). Four *pencerddiaid* (master musicians), who had already graduated at an earlier wedding feast, had their degrees confirmed, and four new apprentices to the master craft (*disgyblion pencerddiaid*), and four “instructable” apprentices (*disgyblion disgyblaidd*) were admitted. The names of the graduating poets are lost, aside from Tudur Aled (d.c.1525) who won the silver chair for poetry – but even he had considerable musical skill. The elegy composed for him by the poet Lewis Daron describes him as “Master craftsman of the two close arts” and specifically commends his progress as musician: “Of wine or honey he used to make praise, / And then played the strings well.”¹³

Associated with the Caerwys eisteddfod of 1523 is the comprehensive set of bardic regulations known as the Statute of Gruffudd ap Cynan – a document that reveals much about instrumental music in Wales.¹⁴ It lists parallel requirements for both poets and musicians, who were graded identically up to the level of *pencerdd* and were examined in broadly comparable tasks. Harp and crwth players were to master a range of set musical forms in order to advance their standing. The statute names seven such forms – *cwlwm ymryson*, *colofn*, *cadair*, *caniad*, *gosteg*, *cwlwm cytgerdd*, and *tri mwchl odidog* – none of which may

However, BL MS Add 14970, the “Iolo Morganwg Manuscript” of c.1800, may be a copy of another of Robert ap Huw’s books, now lost.

¹¹ For an accessible account with parallel text in English and Welsh, see Gwyn Thomas, *Eisteddfodau Caerwys* (Cardiff, 1968).

¹² D. J. Bowen, “Graddedigion Eisteddfod Caerwys” *Llên Cymru*, 2, no. 2 (1952), 129–34, lists names of the musicians.

¹³ “Pencerdd y ddwygerdd agos / ... Gwin neu fêl y gwnâi foliant, / Ag yna, teg ganu tant.” Marwnad [Elegy] no. 3 in *Gwaith Tudur Aled*, ed. T. Gwynn Jones (Cardiff, 1926), II, 731–3. This extract is cited with translation in Gwyn Thomas, *Eisteddfodau Caerwys*, 80–81.

¹⁴ For a recent edition and translation of the Statute, based on BL MS Add. 19711, see David Klausner, “Statud Gruffudd ap Cynan,,” *Welsh Music History*, 3 (1999), 282–98. The requirements of the Statute in relation to *cerdd dant* are discussed in Sally Harper, “The Robert ap Huw Manuscript and the Canon of Sixteenth-Century Harp Music,” *Welsh Music History*, 3, 130–61.

readily be translated into English.¹⁵ A temporary apprentice (*disgybl ysbas graddol*) in 1523 was to learn five *clymau*, one *cadair*, and as many *caniadau* and *gostegion* as his teacher chose, while the *pencerdd* had to offer 30 *clymau*, three *colofnau* and three *cadeiriau*. The demands for each grade are complex, and show that a Welsh musician of the early sixteenth century could command similar payment and a comparable level of respect to a poet. The statute also describes a lesser class of practitioner called an *atgeiniad* or *datgeiniad*, a declaimer or reciter who declaimed poetry on behalf of the poet and often developed a range of supplementary musical skills.

The origin of the music described in the Statute of Gruffudd ap Cynan is elusive. It has to be reconstructed from poetic references, lists, historical chronicles, and theoretical tracts. There is no body of Welsh music to match the great vernacular poetry collections. The only authentic notated source known to survive – the early seventeenth-century Robert ap Huw harp manuscript – is in obscure tablature, and contains just 32 pieces.¹⁶ Only three of the genres mentioned in the statute are represented (*caniad*, *gosteg*, and *cwlwm cytgerdd*), although ap Huw's book contains a few additional items: there are several *profiadau* (mentioned once in the statute in a peripheral reference associated with the *datgeiniad*) and some smaller-scale pieces termed *erddigan*, *pwnc*, and *cainc*. A list in Robert ap Huw's hand at the back of the collection (pages 102–105) shows that he had copied many other pieces in books which are now lost: these included four *cadeiriau*, four *colofnau*, the *tri mwchl odidog* and *tri mwchl newydd*, and many *clymau*. The loss of so much music is frustrating, but Robert ap Huw's notation would surely have baffled many of his contemporaries and predecessors, who normally played from memory. Indeed, it is likely that ap Huw wrote out so much music only because it was on the verge of becoming obsolete. His repertory is distinctly retrospective, and whatever the modifications made when first committing it to paper, the manuscript probably offers a fairly accurate idea of what was being played at the 1523 eisteddfod almost a century earlier.

An embryonic form of the complex music described in the Statute was probably known to the great Welsh poet Dafydd ap Gwilym (fl. ?1315/20–1350/70), some two centuries earlier, since the term *cerdd dant* appears in one of his poems.¹⁷ An item bearing the name of one of his poetic contemporaries, “Cainc Ruffudd ab Adda ap Dafydd” (“The Tune of Gruffudd ab Adda ap Dafydd”), is also found in Robert ap Huw's book on page 57. This very piece is

¹⁵ Brief notes on all of these musical genres and those mentioned below are given in the glossary to *Welsh Music History*, 3 (1999), 299–307.

¹⁶ See note 9 above.

¹⁷ “Ni cherydd Duw, na cherdd dant” (‘God won’t reproach him, nor harp music’), *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, ed. Thomas Parry (Cardiff, 3rd edn 1979), 375–6. See page 17 and note 60 below.

described in an *englyn* attributed to Gruffudd ab Adda: “The tune of Gruffudd ab Adda,/ Firm as the stately trees, of which the uninitiated knows nothing.”¹⁸ This is significant for two reasons. First, the meaning and musical ethos of the term *cerdd dant* seem to have remained fairly constant from the era of Dafydd ap Gwilym to the early seventeenth century, even though the repertory expanded and new musical genres were added. Second, none of the music recorded in any of the numerous *cerdd dant* tune inventories, or in Robert ap Huw’s book, appears to predate the lifetime of Dafydd ap Gwilym. Many items were conceived as eulogies or praise-pieces for named individuals, and with the exception of mythological figures and saints, most of those who lent their names to *cerdd dant* compositions belong to the fifteenth century, with a much smaller number from the fourteenth.¹⁹

The concept of an elevated art music for stringed instruments in Wales nevertheless had much earlier roots. The Welsh chronicle *Brut y Tywysogion*, copied into Peniarth 20 (c.1330) and other sources, contains a famous account of another event constructed along the lines of an eisteddfod – the Christmas feast held by the Lord Rhys at Cardigan in 1176.

At Christmas in that year, the Lord Rhys ap Gruffudd held court in splendor at Cardigan, in the castle. And he set two kinds of contest there: one between bards and poets, another between harpists and crowdiers and pipers and various classes of music-craft. And he had two chairs set for the victors. And he honored those with ample gifts. And of the harpists, a young man from Rhys’s court won the victory. As between the bards, those of Gwynedd prevailed. Each of the suitors obtained from Rhys that which he sought, so that no one was refused. And that feast, before it was held, was announced for a year through all Wales and England and Scotland and Ireland and the other islands.²⁰

¹⁸ “Cainc Ruffudd, groyw-wŷdd ddi-gryn,/ Ab Adda, nis gŵyr bowddyn” I. Williams and T. Roberts, *Cywyddau Dafydd ap Gwilym a’i Gyfoeswyr* (Cardiff, 2nd edn., 1935), 116, taken from British Library MS Add. 14875.

¹⁹ For further discussion, see Sally Harper, “Issues in dating the repertory of *Cerdd dant*,” *Studia Celtica*, 35 (2001), 325–40.

²⁰ *Brut y Tywysogion or the Chronicle of the Princes. Peniarth MS. 20 Version*, translated Thomas Jones (Cardiff, 1952), 71; “Y Nodolic yn y vlwydyn honno y kynnhelis yr Argwlyd Rys ap Gruffud llys yn arderchawc yn Aberteiui yn y kastell ac y gossodes deuryw ymrysson yno, vn yrwng beird a phrydydyon, vn arall yrwng telynoryon a chrythoryon a phibydyon ac amrauaylyon genedloed gerd music. Ac ef a beris gossot dwy gadeir y’r gorchyvigwyr, ac ef a anrydedawd y rei hynny o rodyon ehelaeth. Ac o’r telynoryon, gwas yeuang o llys Rys a gafas y vvdygolyaeth. Yrwng y beird rei Gwyned a orvv. Pawb o’r eirchyeit a gauas y gan Rys yr hynn a geissyawd hyt na wrthladwyt neb. A’r wled honno kynn y gwneuthur a vynegit vlwydyn drwy holl Gymry a Lloegyr a’r Alban ac Ywerdon a’r ynyssed ereill.” *Brut y Tywysogion. Peniarth MS. 20*, ed. Thomas Jones (Cardiff, 1941), 127–8; also cited in J. E. Caerwyn Williams, “Yr Argwlydd Rhys ac ‘Eisteddfod’ Aberteifi 1176: Y Cefndir diwylliannol,” in *Yr Arglwydd Rhys*, ed. Nerys Ann Jones and Huw Prys (Cardiff, 1996), 94–128 (94).

The feast therefore involved two separate contests, with harpists, crwth players and pipers all competed against one another. Although a harpist from Rhys's own court was proclaimed victor, the feast is perceived as no provincial affair: it must have been a major opportunity for experiencing and assimilating a range of musical styles. Whatever the layers of detail added to the account by those who recounted it orally over the years, and eventually wrote it down, there seems no reason to doubt its genuine historical basis. Neither is this the only account to suggest that Welsh music may have been influenced by contact with other countries, as discussed below.

There is reliable evidence that harp, crwth and pipes flourished in Wales during the twelfth century, for Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales) made a meticulous list of instruments in his *Topographia Hibernica* (1188)²¹ and *Descriptio Kambriae* (1193).²² According to Gerald, Wales and Scotland each had three instruments: harp (*cithara*) and crwth (*choro*) were common to both, with pipes (*tibias*) in Wales and tympan (*tympana*) in Scotland. Ireland had just two instruments: harp and tympan.²³ This last instrument seems to have been unknown in Wales at this period, although it soon found its way there, perhaps through the agency of Irish musicians. The harp, however, was already a widely disseminated instrument of elevated status, used by amateurs as well as professionals: "Guests who arrive early in the day are entertained until nightfall by girls who play to them on the harp. In every house there are young women just waiting to play for you, and there is certainly no lack of harps. ... in every Welsh court or family the menfolk consider playing on the harp to be the greatest of all accomplishments."²⁴ Gerald was particularly impressed by Welsh dexterity: "When they play their instruments they charm and delight the ear with the sweetness of their music. They play quickly and in subtle harmony. Their fingering is so rapid that they produce this harmony out of discord."²⁵

²¹ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topographia Hibernica*, in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, ed. James F. Dimock (London, 8 vols., 1861–91), Rolls series, v (1867), 3–204, translated by John J. O'Meara as Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales), *The History and Topography of Ireland* (Portlaoise, revd. edn., 1982).

²² Giraldus Cambrensis, *Itinerarium Kambriae*, vi (1868), 3–152, and *Descriptio Kambriae*, vi, 155–227, translated by Lewis Thorpe as Gerald of Wales, *The Journey through Wales / The Description of Wales* (London, 1978).

²³ "*Hibernia quidem tantum duobus utitur et delectatur instrumentis; cithara scilicet, et tympano. Scotia tribus; cithara, tympano, et choro. Wallia vero cithara, tibiis, et choro.*" *Topographia Hibernica*, v, 154; translated in *The History and Topography of Ireland*, 104.

²⁴ "*Qui matutinis autem horis adveniunt, puellarum affatibus et cithararum modulis usque ad vesperam delectantur. Domus enim hic quaelibet puellas habet, et citharas, ad hoc deputatas... omnes quoque de curia seu familia viri, citra doctrinam omnem, citharizandi per se peritiam tenet.*" Giraldus, *Descriptio Kambriae*, vi, 183; translated in *The Description of Wales*, 236.

²⁵ "*In musicis instrumentis, tanta sonoritatis dulcedine aures deliniunt et demulcent; tanta modulorum celeritate pariter et subtilitate feruntur; tantamque discrepantium sub tam praecipiti digitorum rapacitate consonantiam praestant.*" Giraldus, *Descriptio Kambriae*, vi, 186; translated in *The Description of Wales*, 239.

Gerald's descriptions are important, for they are those of an authentic (if sometimes opinionated) eyewitness. Most of the other commentators on music in early Wales were writing long after the events they describe. The various redactions of the native Welsh Law of Hywel, which suggest much about the use and status of music, are symptomatic of this. They purport to record the legal practice of the tenth century (Hywel ap Cadell died in 949 or 950), but the earliest extant written versions of the Laws date only from the middle of the thirteenth century.²⁶ There is consensus that a core of tenth-century material exists, but it is not always possible to separate this from the inevitable revisions made to reflect changes in contemporary practice.

Hywel's Law refers to three legal harps (*telyn kyfreithawl*) in use at the Welsh court, which was itinerant: there are those of the king and the *pencerdd* (valued equally at six score pence), and that of the *gwrda* or nobleman (worth three score pence).²⁷ Each harp came with its own *cyweirgorn* or tuning horn (valued at 24*d* for king and *pencerdd* and 12*d* for the nobleman). The instrument was an item of status; together with blanket and cauldron, it was one of the three indispensable assets of a nobleman. Two related redactions of the Iorwerth version of the Laws, preserved in the Book of Colan (NLW MS Peniarth 30) and the Black Book of Chirk (NLW MS Peniarth 29), both probably copied by the same scribe in the middle of the thirteenth century, clarify the nature of one type of harp. When a young musician wished to become a *cerddor cyweithas* (a competent craftsman) and as such an independent *eirchiad* (supplicant) for his own work, he was to pay his *pencerdd* instructor 24*d*. He then exchanged his horsehair-strung harp (*telyn raun*) for another unspecified harp (probably a wire-strung instrument like those used in Ireland).²⁸ Was the horsehair harp deemed unsuitable for professional court use at this period, or was it used mostly for accompaniment, with the wire-strung harp used for solo playing? Paradoxically, the horse-hair version had become the very epitome of high status playing by the later fourteenth century, and retained that position well into the sixteenth century, as shown below.

²⁶ The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales, ed. Dafydd Jenkins (Llandysul, 1986) provides an accessible translation based on the Iorwerth redaction; see also T. M. Charles-Edwards, The Welsh Laws (Cardiff, 1989) for discussion of the various versions and their dating.

²⁷ "Teyr telyn kyureythaul esyd: telyn e brenhyn a thelyn penkerd a thelyn gurda. Guerth e due gyntaf chue ugeynt, a pedeyr ar ugeynt ar eu keweyrgorn; telyn gurda try ugeynt, a deudec keynnyauc ar e kyweyrgorn." Llyfr Iorwerth: a Critical Text of the Venedotian Code of Medieval Welsh Law; mainly from BM, Cotton MS Titus Dii, ed. Aled Rhys Wiliam (Cardiff, 1960), 22–23.

²⁸ "Pob penkerd telyn a dylly e'r kerdoryon yeueyng a uynno emadau a telyn raun a mynnu [bot] en kerdaur keweythas a bot en eyrchat." Damweiniau Colan: Llyfr y Damweiniau yn ôl Llawysgrif Peniarth 30, ed. Dafydd Jenkins (Aberystwyth, 1973), 75.

The version of the Laws in the Book of Colan and the Black Book of Chirk also stipulate that the king should recognize the status of master craftsmen in his service by giving each one an appropriate instrument, specified as harp, crwth, or pipes.²⁹ This requirement is interesting on three counts. First, the harp was not the only instrument used at court in the mid thirteenth century (and perhaps much earlier); second, pipes as well as string instruments were acceptable in certain environments; and third, a musician might acquire *pencerdd* status in one of several areas, perhaps indicating the emergence of a specialist musician-figure. Independent instrumental music seems to have been recognized as a serious art-form from at least the early fourteenth century (see below), although poets were still expected to be able to accompany themselves in some manner.

The detailed descriptions of the *pencerdd* and the *bardd teilu* in the Law of Hywel suggest two distinct types of self-accompanying *cerddor*. Dafydd Jenkins clarifies the function of both, indicating that the *bardd teilu* (the bard of the household or war-band) was a core official at court, while the *pencerdd* was a respected visitor whose own domain lay outside (though in principle there was nothing to prevent him from being appointed to the post of *bardd teilu*).³⁰ The role of the *bardd teilu* changed over time. He was originally a full-time follower of the war-band, and would assemble with them in the hall to perform. He sat next to the captain of the household (*penteilu*) on the three special feasts (Christmas, Easter and Pentecost) so that the harp could conveniently be placed in his hand. He was given a harp (later a *tawlbwrdd* or throwboard) by the king when appointed, as a symbol of his status. One of his tasks was to inspire the warriors by singing the text *Unbeiniaeth Prydain* ('The Monarchy of Britain') when they went to battle (or in later sources when they divided the spoils) – a poem that Rachel Bromwich suggests may have been the tenth-century *Armes Prydain*, found in the Book of Taliesin.³¹ The first named *pencerdd*, the harpist Gellan, who according to the *History of Gruffudd ap Cynan* fell at the battle of Aberlleiniog in about 1094, was perhaps performing this very function as Gruffudd ap Cynan's own *bardd teilu*.³²

As Jenkins observes, the *bardd teilu* performed for the *penteilu* on request, but in due course, was no longer required to go out on expedition. By then,

²⁹ “*pob penkert ... e brenyn, byeu keysyau ofer ydau nyd amken atelyn yhun acrud yarall a pybeu yr tredyt.*” *Y Llyvyr Dv or Weun: Facsimile of the Chirk Codex of the Welsh Laws*, ed. J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Llanbedrog, 1909), p. 128, ll. 7–10.

³⁰ Dafydd Jenkins, “*Bardd Teulu and Pencerdd*”, *The Welsh King and his Court*, ed. T. M. Charles-Edwards, Morfydd E. Owen and Paul Russell (Cardiff, 2000), 142–66.

³¹ Rachel Bromwich, review of *A Guide to Welsh Literature, Volume 1, Llên Cymru*, 13, no. 4 (1981), 298–301 (300).

³² “*Ac ena y diguydus Gellan telynyaur penkerd o barthret Gruffud en e llynges.*” *Historia Gruffud Vab Kenan*, edited with introduction by (Cardiff, 1977); D. Simon Evans, *A Medieval Prince of Wales: The Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan* (Llanerch, 1990), p. 42, translation p. 73.

however, the visiting *pencerdd* took precedence when it came to singing in the hall. The *pencerdd* sang first of God, then of the present king or of some other king, and the *bardd teilu* followed suit with three songs of a different kind. It was also the duty of the *bardd teilu* to sing to the queen on request, out of earshot of the rest of the court. This task may eventually have transferred to the queen's chamber, since an additional office of *bardd ystafell* (bard of the chamber) is described in some versions of the Laws.

Although the *pencerdd* was not a regular court official, the Iorwerth redaction indicates that he was one of several additional officers who had his own chair in the hall. He was a special visitor at court feasts and was treated with particular honor, lodging with the heir, presumably because it was impractical for him to return home. He took pupils and solicited for business as he wished. Dafydd Jenkins notes that initially he was a full member of the independent order of bards, not confined to specific post or territory: he had charge over the *cerddorion cyweithas* (the band of bards in that area).³³ Later, when it became necessary to regulate the increasing numbers of bards, the custom perhaps developed of the court recognizing just one *pencerdd* who claimed predominance in that locality.

The term *cerdd dant* itself appears in none of the Lawbooks, although the synonymous phrase *cerdd telyn* ('the art of the harp') occurs in NLW MS Peniarth 37, copied during the first half of the fourteenth century.³⁴ The emergence of the more familiar term seems to be roughly contemporary, first appearing in the earliest extant version of the Welsh bardic grammar in NLW MS Peniarth 20 (c.1330). Like the later grammars, Peniarth 20 is a comprehensive rule book for poets, and ends with a series of triads intended to aid memorization of crucial elements of the poetic craft. However, some of the triads in Peniarth 20 are quite distinct from later versions. Four unique, related triads at the head of the list have important implications for music, bearing in mind that *cerdd* has a series of variable meanings, which could include craft, music, and poetry:

Tri ryw brifgerd ysyd, nyt amgen: kerd dant, kerd vegin, a cherd dauawt.

Teir prifgerd tant ysyd, nyt amgen: kerd grwth, kerd delyn, a cherd timpan.

Teir prifgerd megin ysyd, nyt amgen: organ, a phibeu, a cherd y got [god].

³³ Dafydd Jenkins, "*Bardd Teulu and Pencerdd*," 157–8.

³⁴ "*Pob penkerd telyn adyly y gan y kerdoryon ieueinc auo wrth kerd telyn a mynu ymadaw athelyn rawn a bot yn eirchat.*"

*Teir prifgerd tauawt ysyd: prydu, a dachanu, a chanu gan delyn.*³⁵

There are three main crafts, namely: the craft of the string, the craft of wind, and the craft of the tongue.

There are three main types of string music, namely: crwth music, harp music, and timpan music.

There are three main types of wind music, namely: organ, and pipes, and bagpipe music.

There are three main crafts of the tongue: making poetry, and reciting, and singing it with the harp.

Cerdd dant is here affirmed as a craft of considerable status. It is one of two distinct kinds of instrumental music – one for strings, the other for wind. Both are *prifgerddau* or “main crafts,” placing them on an equal footing with the elevated poetic art. *Cerdd dafod*, however, also has a musical dimension. It is not limited merely to the making of poetry (*prydyddu*) and its recitation (*datganu*), but also encompasses the singing of poetry while accompanying oneself on the harp (*canu gan delyn*). Poets were expected to be versatile. This versatility has already been suggested by the self-accompanying *cerddor* of the Lawbooks, and it is also echoed in the famous lines of the *Marwnat Vthyr oen*, one of the historical poems of Taliesin copied into the early fourteenth-century *Llyfr Taliesin* (NLW MS Peniarth 2): “I am a bard and harpist / I am piper and crowder / To seven score minstrels.”³⁶ By implication, then, the distinct categories of *cerdd dant* and *cerdd vegin* seem to signify solo instrumental music – or at least music made by an instrumentalist who was not merely accompanying himself.

This distinction continues until well into the sixteenth century, when singing a strict-metre *cywydd* to one’s own accompaniment and playing the harp were defined as two entirely separate accomplishments within a list of 24 feats, the *pedair kamp ar hugain*.³⁷ The feats were first mentioned by Lewys Glyn Cothi in a poem of c.1455–85,³⁸ although the earliest complete list of 24 occurs only in the early sixteenth-century manuscript NLW MS Peniarth 56, reproduced by John Davies in his *Dictionarium Duplex* of 1632. The seven cultural feats (*gamp deuluaidd*) consist of poetry; playing the harp; reading Welsh; singing a poetic *cywydd* in four sections and accenting it properly; singing a *cywydd* with string

³⁵ NLW MS Peniarth 20, p. 346, transcribed in *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid*, ed. G. J. Williams and E. J. Jones (Cardiff, 1934), 57.

³⁶ “*Wyf bard ac wyf telynawr./Wyf pibyd ac wyf crythawr/I seith ugein cerdawr.*” *Poems from the Book of Taliesin*, edited and translated J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Llanbedrog, 1915), 144–9.

³⁷ Also listed by Edward Jones, *Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards* (London, 1784, 4th edn, 1825), 18.

³⁸ “*Dug bedair camp ar hugain / hydd garw hir a ddygai'r rhain.*” See “*Moliant Wiliam ap Tomas Fychan*,” *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, ed. Dafydd Johnston (Cardiff, 1995), 119–20.

accompaniment; heraldry; and genealogy.³⁹ A capable individual would apparently master all of these accomplishments, and indeed the list has some resonance with the duties of the *datgeiniad*, an essential figure in the delivery of *cerdd dant*. A specific duty of the *datgeiniad*, however, that of tuning the harp (*cyweirio telyn*), comes much lower down the list of the 24 feats as one of the four inferior feats or *gogampau*, where it is grouped with three related types of board game.

The term *datgeiniad* first occurs among the concluding triads of two later versions of the bardic grammar. The version in Oxford, Jesus College MS 111 (the Red Book of Hergest, copied between 1382 and 1410) states that it is rare to find a *datgeiniad* who can recite a poem exactly as the *prydydd* (poet) made it,⁴⁰ while NLW MS Llanstephan 3, of slightly later date, amplifies this: “Three things ennoble poetry: the promptitude and the boldness of delivery and the ingenuity of the *datgeiniad* and the authority of the *prydydd*, and [having] one knowledgeable in the art of poetry making judgement.”⁴¹ The Statute of Gruffudd ap Cynan maintains this clear division between the *datgeiniad* and the poet in terms of both status and responsibility. The main distinction is that the *datgeiniad* sings something that already exists, while the poet or *gwnaethuriadwr* (maker), creates something original “that has never been made before” (*y peth niwnaethbwyd erioed*).

An early version of the Statute in British Library MS Add. 19711, copied by William Llŷn (1534/5–80), specifies two levels of *datgeiniad*.⁴² To earn a groat, the *datgeiniad* was to serve as man-servant to the poet and offer elementary skills relating to *cerdd dafod*. These included reading and understanding Welsh; classifying and declaiming three types of poetry (the *englyn*, *cywydd* and *awdl*), and advising the poet of any mistakes in his work. The *datgeiniad* was also to know how to create an *englyn* (usually a four-line verse using a single rhyme) himself. For another groat, he should understand the rudiments of music as well as poetry. He was to learn all of the *plethiadau* (six different formulas for striking the strings), one of the *profiadau*, the group of four related pieces called the *gostegion*, and the thirteen *prifgeinciau* (‘main tunes’), to which he should know how to declaim a *cywydd*. In addition, the version of the Statute in BL MS Add.

³⁹ *Barddoniaeth, canu telyn, darllen Cymraeg, canu cywydd pedwar ac accenu, canu cywydd gan dant, tymnu arfu herodraeth.*

⁴⁰ “*damwein yw kaffael datkeinyat a datkano kerd yn gwbyl megys y kano y prydydd,*” *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid*, 17.

⁴¹ “*Tri pheth a vrddassant gerd: ehudrwyd ac ehofynder parabyl ac ethrylith y datkeiniad, ac awdurdawt y prydyd, a chyuarwydyt ar gerddwryaeth yn barnu,*” NLW MS Llanstephan 3, fol. 503v, transcribed in *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid*, 37.

⁴² Transcription and translation by David Klausner, “Statud Gruffudd ap Cynan,” 282–98.

15038 requires him to play the harp and tune it (*kanv telyn ai chwerio*), and learn how to play a *cwlwm* and a *caniad*.⁴³

In NLW MS Peniarth 158 the *datgeiniad* is elevated to a position alongside poet, harpist and crythor as the practitioner of one of the four *kerdd raddol* or “graduate arts”: he might now qualify as temporary apprentice (*disgybl ysbas*) or “instructable” apprentice (*disgybl disgyblaidd*).⁴⁴ He was also to understand the task of the *arwyddfardd* (herald bard) and of family genealogy, to be familiar with the 13 *prifgeinciau* for both harp and crwth and to know how to recite them (*canu hwy ai dafod*). Further, he should be competent in setting the table, carving all types of birds, and keeping those component parts of the musical measures called the *pynciau*.⁴⁵ The copy of the statute made by the renaissance scholar Siôn Dafydd Rhys (c.1534–c.1619), published in 1592,⁴⁶ also indicates that poetry was sometimes performed merely to the beating of a staff on the floor. This was the role of a distinct class of *datgeiniad*, the lowly *datgeiniad pen pastwn* or ‘stick end declaimer’, so called because he recited poetry, but without being able to play a string instrument himself.⁴⁷ However, the *datgeiniad pen pastwn* was only allowed to perform if he had the express permission of any harpist present, implying that accompaniment by a professional harpist was far preferable to the staff.

One of the greatest puzzles of Welsh poetry and music of this period is exactly how they combined in practice. What kind of music did the poet play when he accompanied himself, and how did this differ from what a harpist or crythor played when he accompanied a poem delivered by the *datgeiniad*? How often were harp and crwth heard as solo instruments? The contemporary Welsh poet and translator Anthony Conran is convinced that *cerdd dant* would only have been used in a way that would have helped make the form and structure of poetry intelligible.⁴⁸ He argues that poetry declaimed aloud to set musical pieces would have drowned the verse patterns; more likely, perhaps, the poet either sang to musical accompaniment, or he or the *datgeiniad* declaimed without any accompaniment at all, or else with the staff. If a poem was sung, the instruments

⁴³ Transcribed in Bethan Miles, “*Swyddogaeth a Chelfyddyd y Crythor*” (unpublished MA dissertation, Aberystwyth, 1984), II, 554.

⁴⁴ Miles, *ibid.*, II, 555.

⁴⁵ The measures, which eventually became standardized as a theoretical group of 24, were simple patterns based on the alternation of two basic harmonic units, called the *cyweirdant* and the *tyniad*, notated as 1 and 0. Viewed anachronistically, they have some of the characteristics of tonic and dominant chords. The *pynciau* were seen as part of the musical hierarchy that begin with the simple chord, moving through *pwnc* and measure to the complete piece.

⁴⁶ Siôn Dafydd Rhys, *Cambrobrytannicae Cymraeae Linguae Institutiones et Rvdimenta Accurate* (London, 1592), 295–8; this section of the statute is also transcribed in Miles, *ibid.*, II, 556.

⁴⁷ “*a elwir yr vn a bho yn datcanu heb bhedru dhim canu Tant i hunan.*” Miles, *ibid.*, II, 556.

⁴⁸ The following comments are based on private correspondence between Anthony Conran and Peter Greenhill.

may simply have marked time, or perhaps provided more complex musical interludes between sections of verse. Conran suggests that the poetic forms of *englyn*, *awdl*, and *cywydd* would all have been associated with quite distinct music, as befitted their structural patterns. An *awdl* (a long poem in the traditional metres), for instance, might have had a short instrumental interlude every four bars or so, and a more elaborate interlude, possibly with a new tune, before the appearance of a new main rhyme.

One term, the *gosteg*, describes both a poetic and a musical genre. Robert ap Huw's book contains four *gostegion*, and it appears from earlier inventories of pieces that there were never more than these four, which always appear with invariable titles. The poetic *gosteg* was the chain of short *englynion* that sometimes preceded an *awdl*: it formed an introduction leading up to the subject proper. The opening lines of a famous example by Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr (fl.1155–95) addressed to his patron, the Lord Rhys, calls for silence before a feast: "Court silencers, call for silence. / Silence, poets – it's a poet you'll hear,"⁴⁹ recalling the function of the *gostegwr* (usher) of the Welsh Lawbooks, who calls for silence by striking a post in the hall.⁵⁰ This call for silence, together with the laying of the table, was still an essential ritual in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁵¹ There is no evidence that the musical *gostegion* were intended to accompany their poetic counterpart, but they may have functioned as preparatory music: the piece known as "*Gosteg yr Halen*" comes with a gloss that it was played at the court of Arthur before a meal.⁵²

Robert ap Huw's manuscript offers further clues about the nature of combined poetic and musical performance. The scholar Peter Greenhill suggests that some of the pieces – especially the *caniad* and the *profiad* – are simply too long and structurally irregular to have been intended as accompaniment.⁵³ However, the *clymau cytgerdd*, the *cainc*, and perhaps the *gosteg*, all of much simpler structure, could conceivably have been used for self-accompaniment. An accompanying role is particularly feasible for the series of formulaic *clymau cytgerdd*, which are in essence repeated units based on the 24 measures of *cerdd dant*, varied merely by different ornamentation.

⁴⁹ "*Gostegwyr llys gostegwch / Gosteg beirdd – bardd a glywch*," in "*Englynion a gant Cynddelw i Rys Fab Gruffudd*," *Gwaith Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr II*, ed. Nerys Ann Jones and Ann Parry Owen (Cardiff, 2 vols., 1991–5), II (1995), 211–14.

⁵⁰ *The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales* translated and edited by Dafydd Jenkins, 21.

⁵¹ See, for instance, the instructions in NLW MS Peniarth 147, p. 223: "*Llyma val y gwnaethir mewn ffest Reial*" ("this is how it is done in a royal feast").

⁵² "*terfyn gosteg yr halen yr hon a fyddid yn i ganu o flaen marchogion arthur pan roid y salter ar halen ar y bwrdd*: ("here ends *Gosteg yr Halen*, which was played before Arthur's knights when the salt cellar was placed on the table"). BL MS Add 14905 ("The Robert ap Huw Manuscript"), p.19.

⁵³ Peter Greenhill, "The Robert ap Huw Manuscript: An Exploration of its Possible Solutions," vol. 8 (Verse) (1995), (unpublished dissertation, deposited in the archive of the Centre for Advanced Welsh Music Studies, University of Wales, Bangor), 6–8.

It is also significant that the statute requires the *datgeiniad* to know the thirteen (or fourteen) “main tunes” or *prifgeinciau*. The version in BL MS Add. 15038 implies very specific usage: “The *datgeiniad* should know ... 14 *prifgeinciau* for strings and [how] to declaim a *cywydd* with them.”⁵⁴ Regrettably only their titles survive: they first occur as two separate lists in NLW MS Peniarth 126, copied c.1500, although the same titles recur with various additions in several later inventories, where they are almost invariably attributed to Cadwgan and Cyhelyn. Little is known of these musicians, who are listed as *athrawon* of the harp in NLW MS Gwysaney 28 (see below), although it seems likely that both lived during the fifteenth century.⁵⁵ It is also difficult to see how *prifgeinciau* and the serious poetic *cywydd* blended together: the titles of the *prifgeinciau* mostly suggest a light, “folky” character, very different from the high art connotations of most of the Welsh musical repertory, and indeed of the *cywydd* itself. But there is a suggestion that they may have been altogether redundant without an accompanying text. Robert Rheinallt, a *crwth* player active in the early sixteenth century, specifically required a *cywydd* before he would agree to play: “Mean and treble Robert played,/ Pure tunes from the pretty strings./ An easy sensation, although he would give none of it/ unless he had a *cywydd*.”⁵⁶

The status of Welsh *cerdd dant* seems to have fluctuated. Iorwerth Beli, whose only surviving poem dates from the early fourteenth century, considered *cerdd arwest* (“the art of the sinew or string”; another synonym for *cerdd dant*) to be decidedly inferior to the poetry of bardic contest (*cerdd ymryson*). His *awdl* addressed to a bishop of Bangor, probably Anian Sais (1309–27), laments the ruin of poetic genius, and the passing of the great age of patronage under the Welsh princes.⁵⁷ But even in those glorious days, musicians were the inferior species. In retelling the tale of Maelgwn Gwynedd (d.527), who made his harpists and poets swim across the Menai Strait to Anglesey, Iorwerth observes smugly that the poets emerged relatively unscathed, while the musicians were useless after their soaking. His complaint is two-edged: not only does the bishop favor musicians over poets in the established, elevated mould; he also rewards less talented poets who can speak English. Both groups are offensive. The sound of the instruments played by the bishop’s musicians is especially hideous: “There

⁵⁴ “*Datgeiniad a ddyle wybod ... 14 o brifgeinkeu ar danne a datgan kowydd gida hwy.*” Miles, *Ibid.*, II, 554.

⁵⁵ See Peter Crossley-Holland, *The Composers in the Robert ap Huw Manuscript: The Evidence for Identity, Dating and Locality* (Bangor, 1998), 45–56.

⁵⁶ “*Mên a threbl a wnaeth Robert,/ Tiwniau pur o’r tannau pert./ Naws rhwydd, er dim nis roddai/ Ar sydd, os cywydd nis câi*” Cited in Miles, *Swyddogaeth a Chelfyddyd y Crythor*, I, 472.

⁵⁷ “*Cwyn yn erbyn Esgob Bangor*” in *Gwaith Gruffudd ap Dafydd ap Tudur, Gwilym Ddu o Arfon, Trahearn Brydydd Mawr ac Iorwerth Beli*, ed. N. G. Costigan (Bosco), R. Iestyn Daniel and Dafydd Johnston (Aberystwyth, 1995), 149–69.

was no respect for the uneven willow crwth/ Like the sound of piglets, with its insides broken ... It was horrible to hear the harps hiccoughing/ Made of false wolf skin, with their tight strings.”⁵⁸

The later fourteenth-century poet Dafydd Bach ap Madog Wladaidd or Sypyn Cyfeiliog (fl.1340–90) presents a more positive view of music, indicating that *cerdd dant* was by no means an exclusively solemn form of entertainment. His *awdl* “*Croeso mewn Llys*” (‘Welcome in a Court’) recalls the annual Christmas revels at Bachelldref in eastern mid-Wales, the home of Dafydd ap Cadwaladr. Here, the welcome is universal, “whoever you are, whatever you sing” (“*Ba ddyn bynnag fych, ba gerdd a fetrych*”). The sound of strings permeates the inebriated atmosphere, and *cerddor* and *crwth* played together lead the dance:

*A llawer cerddawr, a llawen grythawr,
A llawenydd mawr uwch llawr llithrig;
A llef gan dannau, a llif gwirodau,
A llafar gerddau gorddyfnedig.*⁵⁹

[Many a minstrel and merry fiddler,
And much the mirth on a polished floor
And a sound of strings, a deluge of drinks,
And the constant cadence of singing.]⁶⁰

Dafydd ap Gwilym (fl. ?1315/20–1350/70), as noted earlier, was apparently the first to use the terms *cerdd dant* and *cerdd dafod* in a poetic (rather than a prose) context. His *cywydd* “*Y Gainc*” confirms that he was another self-accompanying poet, who used his nails to pluck the strings:

*Poed anolo fo ei fin
A'i gywydd a'i ddeg ewin
A gano cerdd ogoniant,
Ni cherydd Duw, na cherdd dant
Gwiw loywglauer ddyn golyglon
Ac yn cael canu'r gainc hon.*⁶¹

[Let his lips, his *cywydd*,
And his ten nails be worthless
Who may sing a song to the glory

⁵⁸ ‘Nid ef a berchid berchyllson debig / Grwth helig terrig, torr/ ..., Agarw oedd glybod eigion – telynau/ O gau wisg fleiddiau, tannau tynion.’ *Gwaith Gruffudd ap Dafydd ap Tudur*, 151.

⁵⁹ Thomas Parry (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse* (Oxford, 1962), 49–50.

⁶⁰ ‘A Christmas Revel’, Joseph P. Clancy, *The Earliest Welsh Poetry* (London, 1970), 189.

⁶¹ *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, ed. Thomas Parry (Cardiff, 3rd edn 1979), 375–6.

(God won't reproach him, nor harp music)
Of a bright, radiant, glad-eyed girl
When he's allowed to sing this song.]⁶²

Dafydd's "Marwnad" (Elegy) for the Anglesey poet Gruffudd Gryg also specifically pairs poetry with the strings: "If any splendid shining maid would love / To hear, with harp-strings, fine[st] praise; / I judge that verse-craft is a widow."⁶³

Iolo Goch (c.1325–c.1398), Dafydd's younger contemporary, provides the first detailed description of the contemporary Welsh harp. His spirited "Cywydd moliant i'r delyn rawn a dychan i'r delyn ledr" ('Praise of the Horsehair Harp and Satire on the Leather Harp'),⁶⁴ like Iorwerth Beli's *awdl*, laments the passing of a 'Once merry Wales / ... whilst there was time for minstrelsy / and the learning of the good old Welsh people'.⁶⁵ Iolo's complaint is that the traditional harp of black horsehair is now being ousted by a new yellow leather harp (*telyn ledr*), an "evil plague shaped like a bare bow."⁶⁶ It is objectionable on all counts: its "jaundiced color, like a yellow mare"; its "bow-legged rough comb ... bent column ... the shape of its womb"; its "guttly sound ... of a nasty lame goose in corn, / noisy crazy Irishwoman." For Iolo its "column and its hoarse voice / were made only for an old Englishman."⁶⁷ The detested harp was perhaps one of several new designs using a leather soundboard over a hollowed-out body and gut strings, very different from the entirely wooden body and shiny black horsehair strings of the *telyn rawn*. The strings on Iolo's harp were apparently a mixture of gut and brass: "It will be hard for an apprentice in a month / to string a brass greyhound bitch," for which the player cultivated specially spiked nails "a curved-tipped nail, nasty thorn" to play.⁶⁸ Brays perhaps accounted for the harsh sound, "flanked by lightning on a stone roof" ("O du mellt ar do mai"). Numerous later poems nevertheless indicate that the favoured horsehair harp continued to hold its own. Siôn Phylip, for instance, in a poem of c.1580, describes a *telyn rawn* tuned by bone tuning-pins: "Wood, skin and hair, lovely and complete the gift; / Which with bone must be tightened."⁶⁹ The professional

⁶² "The Song," Gwyn Thomas, *Dafydd ap Gwilym His Poems* (Cardiff, 2001), 278–9.

⁶³ "O charai ddyn wych eirian/ Gan dant glywed moliant glân,/ Gweddwy barnaf gerdd dafawd." Marwnad Gruffudd Gryg, *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, 56–9; translated Gwyn Thomas *ibid.*, 42–4.

⁶⁴ A parallel text version appears in Iolo Goch: *Poems*, ed. Dafydd Johnston (Llandysul, 1993), 130–32.

⁶⁵ "Gymru ddigrif gynt,/ ... Tra fu amser i glera/ A dysg yr hen Gymru da."

⁶⁶ "Anfad bla llun bwa llwm."

⁶⁷ "rhifwnt liw; Gwilff felen ... cwr bergam disgamar ... llorf cam ... llun ei chroth ... coludd sain/ Sain gwydd gloff an-hoff yn yd,/ Sonfawr Wyddeles ynfyd/ Ni luniwyd ei pharwyden/ Na'i chreglais ond i Sais hen."

⁶⁸ "Anodd i brentis fis fydd/ Ystofi miliast efydd / Ac ewingorn, dorn difwyn."

⁶⁹ "Pren, croen a rhawn, cwbl-ddawn cu,/ Ag esgyrn, rhaid i gwasgu" Cited in A. O. H. Jarman, "Telyn a Chwrth," *Llên Cymru*, vi (1960–61), 154–75.

harp of the sixteenth century seems to have combined the best of both worlds: horsehair strings with brays and a leather-covered frame.

The poets had less to say about the *crwth*, perhaps because of its less elevated status, although there are several surviving descriptions.⁷⁰ Robert Rheinallt, for instance, musician to Henry VIII, was the addressee of a poem requesting a conventional Welsh six-stringed *crwth* for Edward of Yale.⁷¹ Of the third instrument associated with *cerdd dant*, the tympan, even less is known: its history in Wales was probably short-lived. Virtually all of the surviving references from the time of Gerald of Wales onwards link it with Ireland. Indeed, the *Annales Breues Hibernie* of Thady Dowling, who died in 1628, claim specifically that it was one of a series of instruments brought to Wales from Ireland by Gruffudd ap Cynan in 1137: his list includes lyres (*lyras*), tympanas (*tympanas*), *crwths* (*cruttas*), harps (*cytharas*) and harp players (*cytharizantes*).⁷² The few references in Welsh literature all group the tympan with harp and *crwth* (and sometimes pipes).⁷³ There was nevertheless a piece within the *cerdd dant* repertory called “*cor tympan*” (“tune of the tympan”), perhaps the basis for a *cwlwm* of that name listed by Robert ap Huw in a long list of other *clymau*.⁷⁴

Frequent references to named Welsh musicians in vernacular poetry suggests that they were very highly regarded. The harpists Hildir and Gruffudd ab Adda, both praised by Dafydd ap Gwilym (see above),⁷⁵ are apparently the first genuine (rather than mythological) musicians whose names are attached to pieces in the *cerdd dant* repertoire: a “*Caniad crych i Hildir*” is listed in NLW MS Gwysaney 28. There are also early pieces honoring Hildir’s son Adda and his grandson Ieuan, and the Welsh hero Y Brenin Lawgoch (assassinated by an English agent in 1378). One of the most powerful of all Welsh poetic eulogies is Dafydd ab Edmund’s late fifteenth-century *mawrnad* addressed to the harpist Siôn Eos (‘Siôn Nightingale’), which compares him with two slightly earlier musicians, Llef Gŵr and Y Basant, both apparently *crwth* players.⁷⁶ Siôn’s own prowess as both learned teacher as master of various musical forms is

⁷⁰ A selection of poems relating to the *crwth* and *crwth* players are given by Bethan Miles, “*Swyddogaeth a Chelfyddyd y Crythor*.”

⁷¹ Cited in Miles, *ibid.*,

⁷² Thady Dowling, *Annales Breves Hiberniae*, in Friar John Clyn and Thady Dowling, *The Annals of Ireland*, The Irish Archaeological Society, (Dublin, 1849), 8.

⁷³ “*A thrwy honno y dychymygwyt a vu o gerd delyn, a chrwth a thympan, a phibeu*” *Ystoria de Carolo Magno o Lyfr Coch Hergest*, ed. Stephen J. Williams (Cardiff, 1930), 168.

⁷⁴ *BL MS Add. 14905*, “The Robert ap Huw Manuscript,” 102, 104.

⁷⁵ *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, ed. Parry, 50–52; translated Gwyn Thomas, *Dafydd ap Gwilym His Poems*, 38–9.

⁷⁶ “*Bu’n dwyn dan bob ewin dant, / Bysedd llef gŵr neu basant*” (Each finger-nail held a string, / Keys of Llef Gŵr or Basant.’ Thomas Parry (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse* (Oxford, 1962), 138–41. Translation adapted from Joseph P. Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Lyrics* (New York, 1965), 229–31.

unmatched: “Is there, now Nightingale’s gone, / His equal at playing a *gosteg*, / A *profiad* and manly *caniad*, / A *chwlm* in a nobleman’s presence?”⁷⁷

But despite such poetic references, the history of *cerdd dant* up to the beginning of the sixteenth century remains fragmentary. There are no notated sources, no extended theoretical works, and certainly nothing on the scale of the Welsh bardic grammars, which had now been circulating for well over a century. The codification of *cerdd dafod* was way ahead of its musical counterpart. The rules of Welsh poetry were meticulously recorded: its canonic set of 24 metres had already undergone one phase of revision at the hand of Dafydd ab Edmund in the 1450s, and substantial written collections of poetry – which was also primarily an oral form – were beginning to circulate. There were as many as ten known manuscripts of Dafydd ap Gwilym’s works by about 1500.⁷⁸ The documentation of *cerdd dant* began on a much smaller scale, perhaps at the very end of the fifteenth century. The earliest sources of note, all of them very brief, date from around 1500. NLW MS Peniarth 55 lists the titles of 22 pieces (including a “*barnod ddavdd ab gwilym*”), NLW MS Peniarth 126 lists the *prifgeinciau*, and NLW MS Peniarth 60 contains two separate lists of musical measures, comprising 24 for the harp and 26 for the *crwth*. It is interesting that neither MS Peniarth 60 nor some of the pieces in Robert ap Huw’s book correspond neatly with the canonical list of 24 measures that eventually emerged to match the 24 strict metres of poetry: the process of canonization was evidently as much a theoretical as a practical exercise.

A more significant milestone was the compilation of a complex book of rules, the *Cadwedigaeth Cerdd Dannau* or *Conservation of Cerdd Dant*, apparently designed to match the bardic grammar. The earliest extant sources for the *Cadwedigaeth* are NLW MS Gwynsaneu 28 (c.1560) and NLW Peniarth 155 (c.1561–2),⁷⁹ although an original may have been drafted rather earlier. Not surprisingly the treatise reflects the technical approach of the poetic grammar, but there is one interesting distinction: this new “musical grammar,” unlike its literary counterpart, opens with a pseudo-history. It describes a council of named musicians meeting in Ireland at Glyn Achlach (Glendalough) in the time of “Mwrthan Wyddel” (the Irish prince Muirchertach Ua Briain (d.1119)), to establish a set of rules to assist the composition, memorization, performance, and

⁷⁷ “*Oes dyn wedi’r Eos deg/ Yn gystal a gân gosteg,/ A phrofiad neu ganiad gŵr / A chwlm gerbron uchelwr?*”

⁷⁸ See Daniel Huws, “The Transmission of a Welsh Classic: Dafydd ap Gwilym,” *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, 84–103.

⁷⁹ Texts are collated in Bethan Miles, “Swyddogaeth a Chelfyddyd y Crythor,” II, 557–69.

classification of *cerdd dant* and to create the 24 musical measures “in the Irish language.”⁸⁰

The idea of the Glendalough council was surely an attempt to elevate the status of *cerdd dant* by proving its pedigree. Much of the historical detail is fictional, at least in terms of the named participants, but there is a significant model: it is strongly reminiscent of the prologue to the Welsh Lawbooks. Mwrthan, “chief lord at that time,” presides over the gathering of four *penceirddiaid* and two named witnesses, just as Hywel ap Cadell, “ruler of all Wales,” summons the wisest men in the land, comprising four laymen and two scholars from each *cantref* in Wales. Both meet at a place with significant ecclesiastical associations: the musicians at the ancient monastic site of Glendalough, associated with St Kevin, the lawyers at Tŷ-gwyn (the Cistercian abbey of Whitland, in Carmarthenshire). Mwrthan commands that the musical regulations be kept secure and correctly classified to prevent mistakes in music, as Hywel seeks to prevent misuse of existing laws. The musical regulations are created “though the unity and counsel of those wise teachers” (“*thrw yndeb gyd gyngor yr athrawon doethion hynn*”) while the laws are examined “with the advice and consent of the wise men that had come there” (“*o kyd kaghor a kyd synedyaeth. e doython a doytant eno*”). Ultimately, Hywel gives his authority “that they should be kept securely and firmly” (“*orckemenus en kadarn eu kadu en cra*”), while Mwrthan confirms the musical regulations “through his whole ability and authority, and commanded everyone to secure and correctly classify the 24 measures and to keep them authentically, unmuddled, and to classify the gamut each one together” (“*drwy i holl allv i swyddav a gorchymyn i bawb I swkyrio ac yn wir dosbarth ... ai gwypo yn ddilys ddidramgwydd*”). Both prologues share an obvious function. Whatever their actual historical authenticity, their purpose was to imbue the real material of the document with authority, sanctioning it for the contemporary age. In both instances, challenge to the validity of the material thereby became more difficult.

Invocation of the past in an attempt to authorize current practice was used still more overtly in the Statute of Gruffudd ap Cynan, which refers to an earlier (and perhaps fictional) Caerwys eisteddfod summoned by Gruffudd during the early twelfth century. As in 1523, the intention was allegedly to root out “useless weeds” (*gorweigion chwynn*) and establish an appropriate code of behavior. Provision of a model to which craftsmen could aspire must have also have inspired the compilation (most likely in the 1520s) of two lists of master musicians (*athrawon*) of *cerdd dant*, one for harp, one for crwth, recorded in NLW

⁸⁰ For a fuller discussion of this document, see Sally Harper, “So How Many Irishmen Went to Glyn Achlach? Early Accounts of the Formation of *Cerdd dant*,” *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 42 (2001), 1–25.

MS Gwysaney 28 (c.1560).⁸¹ The list of 14 harp masters ends with three eisteddfod victors: Cynwrig Bencerdd to represent Carmarthen in the 1450s, and Edward Cherk and Dai Nanclyn to represent Caerwys in 1523. The list is broadly chronological, opening with Hildir, mentioned by Dafydd ap Gwilym, but mostly comprises rather obscure harpists, one or two of whom are mentioned by the poets. Some were certainly genuine musicians: Cadwgan and the brothers Ieuan ap y Gof and Dafydd Athro all lend their names to pieces identified in early tune lists, and even in the notated music of Robert Huw's manuscript. The list of master crwth players is slightly different. Although ending with the 1523 graduate Thomas ap Madoc, who is preceded by various musicians known to have been active in the late fifteenth century, it begins with two apparently mythological figures from the Glendalough council: Rydderch Foel and Oloff. Here is further evidence, perhaps, that the crwth had a less auspicious pedigree than the harp.

One of the surprises of both lists is that the more recent musicians, including those whose degrees were confirmed at Caerwys in 1523, seem neither to have produced any music of their own, nor to have inspired elegies or tributes from others – their names never appear in the titles of *cerdd dant* pieces. Even Robert ap Huw's book, copied in the early seventeenth century, makes no mention of the 1523 victors and their immediate predecessors. This is not to say that new composition stopped entirely, for it is mentioned as a requirement in the statute: "A teacher of music should compose *clymau* and *caniadau* himself under guarantee."⁸² Nevertheless, pieces created during the sixteenth century were clearly deemed inappropriate for inclusion in the existing canon.

The final phase in the recording and canonizing of *cerdd dant* came with the invention of a unique tablature notation. Its origins remain elusive, although it apparently dates back to at least the middle of the sixteenth century, since one section of Robert ap Huw's book allegedly reproduces part of a lost manuscript belonging to the harpist Wiliam Penllyn, who graduated *pencerdd* at the second Caerwys eisteddfod in 1567.⁸³ There is no evidence that Wiliam Penllyn himself was the inventor of the tablature, although whoever did devise it demonstrated considerable ingenuity: it bears no close resemblance to any other form of notation used elsewhere in Europe. It even appears to have presented problems for Robert ap Huw, who made several blunders in copying and added his own

⁸¹ NLW MS 17116B (Gwysaney 28), fo. 65v (crwth list) and fo. 61r (harp list). A facsimile of the latter appears in *Welsh Music History*, 3 (1999), 196. Transcriptions of both lists appear in *ibid.*, 156–7 (crwth) and 196 (harp), and in Miles, *Swyddogaeth*, II, 702–4.

⁸² "Athro o gerdd dant a ddyly gwnaeth kwlwv a chaniadav E hunan yn warantedic." David Klausner, "Statud Gruffudd ap Cynan," 288.

⁸³ Page 22 includes a note in an eighteenth-century hand: "Yma canlyn y pedwar kwlwm cydgerdd ar hugain; wedi ei prikiu allan Lyfr Wiliam Penllyn" ("here follow the 24 *clymau cytgerdd*, copied from Wiliam Penllyn's book").

layer of modern rhythmic notation above the stave in the latter part of the book, presumably for purposes of clarification.

Cerdd dant was still holding its own in 1567, when the Statute of Gruffudd ap Cynan was revised and reissued for the second Caerwys eisteddfod. The demands on aspiring graduates were even higher than in 1523, but the participants were apparently equal to the challenge: 16 crwth players and 21 harpists are listed in NLW MS Peniarth 169, outnumbering their 17 poetic contemporaries, and far outweighing the 13 musical graduates from 1523.⁸⁴ But the tide was beginning to turn. An effort to organize a third eisteddfod “at a convenient place and tyme” in 1594 was aborted, although the objectives of this gathering were broadly similar to its predecessors: “... to trie & examine who be worthie to weare & beare awaye the same silver prices ... and to represses suche as be vnskillfull & leade a roguishe life.”⁸⁵

The dilemma for Welsh musicians stemmed partly from the flood of pan-European music erupting across the English border, and partly from the changing mode of patronage. Some of the wealthier households, including families at Lleweni and Gwydir, both in Denbighshire, north Wales, still supported *gwŷr wrth gerdd* into the 1590s and beyond, but their tastes were changing as they became more aware of English diversions.⁸⁶ Sir John Wynn of Gwydir, for instance, ensured that his eldest son could learn English or European-style instrumental and vocal music by sending him to Bedford school in 1597, and by 1621, the young ladies of Craflwyn, near Beddgelert, were being taught at home by “a very good musician on the base viol and virginals” from Salisbury, Wiltshire.⁸⁷ Some Welsh musicians perhaps responded to the new climate with versatility, adapting English tunes for harp and crwth, but the environment must have been competitive. One of the fortunate few was the Welsh harpist Thomas Richards, employed by the Stradling household at St Donat’s in south Wales, who became proficient not simply on the native harp but also on an unnamed “instrument stringed with wires” – presumably an Irish harp – which during the 1580s took him into the English houses of some of the great Elizabethans, Sir Philip Sidney included.⁸⁸ In this respect, at least one Welsh instrumentalist seems to have overtaken his English contemporaries.

⁸⁴ D. J. Bowen, “Graddedigion Eisteddfod Caerwys,” *Llên Cymru*, 2 no. 2 (1952), 129–34.

⁸⁵ The 1594 petition is reproduced in Evans, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*, 2 vols. (London, 1898–1910) I, 293–5.

⁸⁶ See Sally Harper, “Music in the Welsh Household c.1480– c.1620,” *Welsh History Review*, 21 (2003), 621–45, and John Gwynfor Jones, “*Cerdd a Bonedd yng Nghymru 1540–1640: Rhai Argraffiadau*,” *Welsh Music*, 6 (1981), 22–33; 7 (1982), 25–40; 8 (1983), 30–47.

⁸⁷ *Calendar of Wynn (of Gwydir) Papers 1515–1690 in the National Library of Wales and Elsewhere*, ed. John Ballinger (London, 1926), 151–2, no. 967 from NLW MS 9057E.

⁸⁸ Richards and his harp are commended in a letter of 1583 written to Sir John Stradling by Sir Arthur Bassett, a Devonshire land-owner. See J. M. Traherne (ed.), *Stradling Correspondence: A Series of Letters*

One of the most telling voices within this climate of change is the poet Siôn Tudur. In a poem probably written around 1574, the “*Marwnad gwŷr wrth gerdd*” (‘elegy for the men at their art’), he laments the passing of twenty great practitioners of *y ddwysgerdd*, or the twin arts of Welsh music and poetry – nine harpists, seven *crwth* players and four poets.⁸⁹ *Cerdd dant* had by now become a great learned art, well able to hold its own alongside *cerdd dafod*. For Siôn Tudur, the loss was not simply of twenty men of outstanding ability, but the disappearance of a whole way of life: “Where has the skill of the pillars of learning gone? / The company of master-musicians / poets, true their proficiency?” (“*Ple’r ai dawn pilerau dysg, / Plaid penceirddiaid cywirddysg*”). His poetic contemporary William Cynwal (d.1587/8) also composed a series of four elegies to named individual harpists, cataloguing their prowess as masters of the most demanding *eisteddfod* pieces and of the technical intricacies of the art.⁹⁰ Fashionable English ditties might well be ousting indigenous instrumental music in terms of popularity, but they could never compete with the complex refinements of *cerdd dant* where antiquity or cultural standing was concerned.

By the time these two poets were writing, the term *cerdd dant* had been in the vocabulary for almost 250 years. Following its emergence as an independent craft in the early fourteenth century, at much the same time as the strict metre *cywydd*, Welsh instrumental music had proliferated gradually. The main phase of musical “composition” – so far as may be deduced from sixteenth-century inventories – came in the later fifteenth century, with a standard *eisteddfod* repertory crystallizing during the early sixteenth century as a means of maintaining standards. No piece whose title survives seems to postdate 1500, although this is not to say that harpists and *crythors* stopped devising new music around an agreed framework.

To what extent this mature form of *cerdd dant* related to the repertory of the “competent craftsmen” or *cerddorion cyweithas* described in the Laws of Hywel Dda is unclear, although the status of both musics seems to have been comparable, and the partnership between music and poetry a critical one. At both ends of the chronological spectrum, poetry was clearly performed with some form of musical accompaniment, and in due course the task of

Written in the *Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1840), 238–40, and Harper, “Music in the Welsh Household,” 629–31.

⁸⁹ Enid Roberts, *Gwaith Siôn Tudur* (Cardiff, 2 vols., 1980), I, 555–7, no. 140; notes, II, 499–503. Edward Jones, *Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards* (London, 2nd edn., 1794), pp. 50–52 also printed this poem with his own translation.

⁹⁰ See Enid P. Roberts, “Marwnadau Telynorion,” *Trafodion Cymdeithas Hanes Sir Ddinbych*, 15 (1966); reprinted in *Cerdd a Chân*, ed. Wyn Thomas (Denbigh, 1982), 112–47.

accompanying became – at least on occasion – the responsibility of an independent instrumentalist. The *datgeiniad*, or professional performer, was also an important partner to the poet from at least 1400, and a proficient *datgeiniad* apparently used a selection of simple set musical pieces to accompany himself when declaiming poetry. However, if the evidence of the bardic triads in NLW MS Peniarth 20, and the distinction made in the list of 24 feats between accompanying oneself while performing poetry and playing the harp *per se* is reliable, *cerdd dant* in the true sense of the word seems to have implied solo instrumental music. This solo context would seem to account for virtually all of the repertory in the only authentic extant Welsh musical source, Robert ap Huw's retrospective early seventeenth-century harp manuscript, where many of the pieces are too long and intricate to be viable as accompaniment. Such music seems to have been delivered not simultaneously with poetry, but in alternation with it. Much remains to be done to establish the exact interrelationship of these two crafts, *y dwysgerdd*, but we may at least be certain that Welsh instrumental music enjoyed an active partnership and all but equal status with its poetic counterpart for most of the sixteenth century.