

Eight Traditional Welsh Children's Songs arranged for Virtuoso Guitar Quartet

Notes For Players (all Songs)

(Additional information is in the 'Program Notes for Audiences'.)

Any number of these separate songs may be played together in any sequence, ideally a set of three should work well.

Deryn y Bwn o'r Banna

The “Aderyn y Bwn” is the bittern, a bird distinguished by its very characteristic low note which in the original song emphasizes the 6th of the scale. Throughout the song I've retained this harmonic emphasis, even to the major 6th (C#) colouring the final E major chord. The original melody appears in augmentation (and sometimes imitated in canon). The augmented version of melody should be audible, and not drowned out by various “bird calls” in the other parts. Here, and in later almost minimalistic sections, the intended impression is of birdsong and echoing thematic motifs should stand out. While listeners won't be able to follow all the notes they should be left with an impression real birdsong.

Bars in 6/8 and 3/4 time are found in quick succession, if not otherwise explicitly indicated rhythm may be inferred from the beaming pattern of quaver passages.

Some high quiet passages are not intended to dominate the texture – examples include guitar 2 bar 76, bar 87 and onwards.

In bar 143, 145, the imitation between guitars 1, 2 and 4 should be audible (also in guitar 3 bar 150).

Robin Ddiog

There are two principal textures in this song melodic and imitative(as at bar 13). Melodic sections, of course, may not necessarily have the melody in the top voice.

In the melodic sections the player with the principal melody should play as freely and expressively as possible (the electronic performance is a poor model.) The task of the other three players is simply to accompany as sensitively as possible .

In imitative sections aim for a consistency of phrasing between parts – contrapuntal echoes of each idea should have the same phrasing.

In bars 26 onward the original song text describes waves. The notes in Guitars 3 and 4 are sound paintings of those waves.

Hen Fenyw Fach Cyweli

If you following the phrasing this scherzo-like song plays itself. This quartet is close to being a transcription of one of my choral fantasies. Hence the texture is quite light and bright throughout, it contrasts well with some other songs especially those which which verge on orchestral. Split beaming between crotchets indicates singer's breathing point, it should also influence your phrasing. (If in doubt sing the parts).

Feel free to add extra notes to the harmony parts in the very exuberant section beginning bar 165. (Composers may be less prescriptive about some note pitches and durations than many players think, especially as the composer is divorced from the immediate acoustic of the concert hall – too muddy in one acoustic context is too thin in another). But be careful the low D's of guitar four don't ring on when not intended – especially if the acoustic is muddy. If a 7th string instrument is available please don't use the 7 string instrument for the 4th part.

Marwnad yr Ehedydd

The most demanding song in this collection. It attempts a layered orchestral sound, additional guitars might have been nice but I wanted to all eight pieces to be scored for 4 guitars. (Just occasionally a group might play all eight Fantasias as a set.)

In order to be expressive – the tempi may vary quite considerably (The electronic performance is a poor model). Some sections should be almost excessively legato – especially when the chords are split as single notes between three or four players. There are number of places where one or more of the guitars must damp to absolutely nothing – sometimes after a fortissimo chord, that will almost certainly involve using both hands to damp the sound.

Very rapid pp or ppp arpeggios after bar 77 should create a gentle soft brushing sound or harmonic mush. Returning very quietly to the first note of the arpeggio after the arpeggio is permissible if it assists in making a steady balanced sound. If a 7th string instrument is available please don't use the 7 string instrument for the 3rd and 4th part.

Can y Melinydd

Contrasts of tone and rhythm are very important in this song. For example, the ponticello at 158 should be really extreme – four classical guitars are capable of creating a very electric sound in such passages. Eight bars later a return to normality should be quite a shock. Note those sections that describe the turning of those ponderous water line gear wheels – bars 65 to 74 and 152 to 156, the listener should “feel” the bass rumble. In exactly the opposite fashion bars 77 to 80 should be remarkable for including only treble.

B'le 'wyt Ti'n myned

As with Can y Melinydd very contrasting tones are essential. Note that the high G's and E's in guitar three at bar 54 are “overtone mixtures” – similar to the effect of an organ stop. The music needs to go with a real swing from bars 69 onwards. In the “hard rock” section be quite mercilessly rhythmic – I remember coming out of a choral rehearsal and being plunged straight from renaissance polyphony into loud mechanical dance music from a nearby show ground. For a moment I thought I had stepped inside a large industrial machine – that's the mechanical effect we want in bar 265. By all means 'bend' some of the melody notes (especially G's and G sharps).

False relations abound – just take them in your stride. Thanks to Emilio Pujol I assume nearly every guitarist has read the famous note in : Alonso Mudarra's *Fantasia X que contrahaze la harpa en la manera de Luduvico* "Desde aqui fasta acerca del final ay algunas falsas tañiendose bien no parecen mal." From here until near the end there are some false tones, played well, they don't seem bad!

Bu Farw'r Cathod

Some of the textures can become very complex. Having a clear idea of what the group will project as the *Hauptstimme* and what becomes *Nebenstimme* (or *Nebenstimme's*) will help, I don't mark them in because the choice is creative and depends on your playing. In some cases parts “creep in” by stealth (e.g. the Repeated G's and G Sharps starting bar 105) and gradually fade into prominence while other parts fade out. As with other songs change of tone and volume is critical.

This song is unusually pictorial. Imagining the overloaded mice in their various emotional states, and the final unexpected attack by the cat definitely will help.

Dacw Dadi'n Myndi'r Fair

This begins in raucous careless fashion. There is definite hint of hillbillyism in some of those offbeat notes. Later various quaver passages should sound casual and improvised. Later still the whole mood changes; the repeated F sharp to D figure in bar 121 should sound like a romantic horn call from Sibelius or Wagner. Later still, around bar 150 we reach the sinister world of a horror movie sound track. Eventually various quaver passages will lead us back to a point where the main melody can fade back in and final end with more hillbilly flavouring. Provided its well played the audience will follow you on this musical journey, Don't attempt to play it too quickly, or all the casual folkiness is lost.