



Gwilym  
Morus-Baird  
Oct 29

## Folksongs for the Leri

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(*I'r rheiny ohono chi sy'n darllen Cymraeg, cewch gyflwyniad llawnach ar wefan [gwilmor.com](http://gwilmor.com)*)

*Penillion i'r Leri* roughly translates as 'Folksongs for the Leri', and that is exactly the intention of the project, to get local folk to write lyrics about the Leri that I then work into folksongs.

Its not that difficult for Welsh folk to write such lyrics - the rhythm and rhyme of Welsh folksongs comes easily to those who want to write them, as do limericks and the such like in English. In many ways, the whole point is to do what comes naturally, without too much fuss or worry about what's fashionable, perhaps even remaining wilfully ignorant of the 'contemporary', that bane of all working 'creatives'. Welsh folk lyrics (of which there are copious variations going back several hundred years) are often a deft balance of the everyday and the profound, of the natural and the supernatural, of the new and the old, of the common and the refined. They have traditionally drawn on all aspects of life, not just the new and sexy. Fashion doesn't come into it. Folksongs are / were about things that last, not the next big thing.

The lyrics that have been contributed so far are just that, outpourings that flow naturally into a traditional form, stable and resilient. This is not to say that these contributions are in any way bland or commonplace, or even that rough around the edges (which I had at least half-expected). They've all adhered to a certain standard, and this has got me thinking. What I'm guessing is that the tradition itself is in some way self-correcting; perhaps that's what 'tradition' means.

By a process of almost Darwinian selection only the best folk lyrics have been carried through into the enduring body of the folk tradition. As a result, when emulating the traditional style the tradition itself demands a particular refinement before a new lyric can rightly be considered worthy of the title 'traditional'. There certainly isn't as much indecision about how good or bad a lyric is during composition, as is often the case in my experience of other styles - it either sounds like the tradition (good) or it doesn't (bad). There's an inbuilt standard that comes with the medium, and if you have an ear for it then off you go. This pet theory of mine is so far holding water; I've yet to receive a bad *penill* in the traditional style.

For example, below is (almost certainly a bad) translation of one recent contribution from Bleddyn Owen Huws of Talybont, followed by a sketch recording of me singing it. Because translation is an impossible bridge to cross in one piece it would be silly to pretend that my bad English translation was proof of how good these folk lyrics are in Welsh. I include it only in the hope that at least the bare meaning will make it across the divide; you will have to trust me regarding the artistry of the native words themselves. Using a river as a metaphor for time is quite a common thing to do, and therefore a good metaphor for a folk lyric. This also means there is a danger for such a theme in such a style to drown in its own affectation, but in the Welsh original Bleddyn has succeeded in balancing the common with the refined.

I particularly appreciated this contribution as it evokes the sounds of hymn singing that would have once resounded through Cwm Eleri. Can you imagine the sound of several hundred people singing their hearts out on a Sunday morning? Now place yourself atop a hill some distance away, the four parts of the harmony mixing with the rush of the river and the wind in the trees. That once common and awesome sound has sadly disappeared from our environment, but its still an evocative one to imagine.

### The River Leri

**What's that sound in the River Leri  
rushing on towards the sea?  
What chords are in her waters  
swelling into one encore?**

**Is it the mournful sound of days long gone,  
old melodies of congregations  
roaring wild in her boiling waters  
as she pours on between the hills?**

**Is it the sound of voices from the past  
stirring me by night and day  
that echo along her shores,  
sometimes merry, sometimes mournful?**

**Some say its the sound of her tears  
heard endlessly every day  
above the bracken in Braichgarw,  
whether it be rain or shine.**

**I hear a song that's older than history  
as she rushes to the sea,  
the timeless song of long centuries  
drowning these brief moments I hear.**

And here's the first draft recording (which will change for the better once my sister Siwan joins me for harmony and second guitar) on Soundcloud:

<https://soundcloud.com/gwilym-morus-baird/fy-eiliadau-i-v1>

For those of you interested in hearing more, please visit the music page on the project website

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newydd glywed y can - melys iawn, llongyfarchiadau pawb! pa mor hyfryd x



[Sara Penrhyn Jones](#) 29 months ago

Dam o waith hyfryd Gwilym- y sgwennu (diolch) a'r cerddoriaeth. Dylet ti gymeryd mwy o gredyd am y cyfieithu hefyd!!



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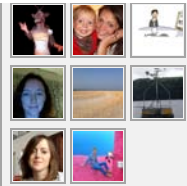
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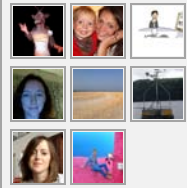
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