

Open letter from Dulais Rhys, Musician in Residence, Composer, Conductor and Music Director for Blodwen

### **Press release**

From: Dulais Rhys (Joseph Parry biographer and Guest Conductor of 'Blodwen 2019')

Blodwen 2019: a unique Welsh-American event 😊

In May/June 2019, Rimrock Opera Foundation, in association with

NOVA Center For The Performing Arts in Billings, will produce Joseph Parry's Blodwen – the first Welsh opera.

This will be an historic Welsh-American 'first' for many reasons, including:

- This will be the first staged performance of Blodwen in the USA
- Rimrock will be the first American company to produce an opera sung in Welsh
- This production will use my new chamber version of the orchestration

We invite you to audition be part of this once-in-a-lifetime event. If you are currently undecided, please read on! I hope that the following information will convince you to participate in this unique trans-Atlantic musical event.

### **THE COMPOSER**

Dr. Joseph Parry (1841-1903), was born in Wales and emigrated with his family to Danville, Pennsylvania when he was twelve years old. Parry became an American citizen and as a musician, rose to fame among immigrant Welsh communities, who then raised funds for him to study at the Royal Academy of Music in London.

In Wales, he became well known as a composer, performer and teacher, resulting in the Gorsedd of Bards of the National Eisteddfod conferring on him the apt bardic name 'Pencerdd America' [America's Principal Musician].

In 1874, Parry was appointed Wales's first Professor of Music at the recently founded University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (now Aberystwyth University), where he composed Blodwen, the hymn-tune Aberystwyth (which subsequently carried the name of that town throughout the English- and Welsh-speaking world) as well as the iconic Myfanwy for male voices, sung with great effect in John Ford's Oscar-winning 1941 movie 'How Green Was my Valley'.

## **OPERA PLOT & STYLE**

Following the pattern of Romantic Italian opera, the story takes place in 14th century Wales and includes a wedding, lovers, dying heroes and a dramatic final plot twist.

The opera's stirring music shows Parry at his dramatic best: lyrical and heroic solos, love duets, exciting ensembles and powerful choruses. A well-known (especially in Wales) love duet, colloquially known as 'Hywel a Blodwen', remains popular as a concert item and is considered one of the highlights of a Blodwen performance. Parry also includes traditional Welsh melodies, often weaving them with his own music, such as the familiar march 'Gwŷr Harlech' [Men of Harlech], which is given masterly contrapuntal treatment in the Overture and final Chorus.

Singing in Welsh is not difficult! Unlike English or French, Welsh is mostly phonetic and there is plenty

of information online to help with the pronunciation.

With myself and professional singers from Wales, will be readily available during rehearsals to other singers with the Welsh pronunciation.

## **LIBRETTO**

In order that non-Welsh speakers may sing Blodwen in its original language, the new score includes an Editor's Phonetic Version of the Welsh lyrics. An online libretto also includes this EPV as well as an International Phonetic Alphabet version. A spoken recording of the libretto is also available online. (see Blodwen link below).

## **THE NEW CHAMBER VERSION**

Until recently, the only orchestral version of Blodwen was an arrangement for full orchestra of the original (but flawed) Parry score that I was commissioned to prepare for the 1978 Gwyl Gerdd Menai/Menai Music Festival in Wales. That concert performance commemorated the centenary of the first performance of Blodwen and was broadcast live on the BBC. A recording was released by Sain records - a cd is available via:

sainwales.com or other online retailers.

In 2015, I completed a chamber version of the orchestration, making Blodwen accessible

for performance in smaller theaters by amateur groups as well as professional companies.

CODA!

I envisage that Blodwen 2019 will create a great deal of press interest - locally in Billings, nationally in Wales (in both English- and Welsh-medium media) as well as across the major news networks of the U.S.A. The production will also shine a spotlight on Rimrock Opera and reinforce its pioneering reputation.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I hope that you will take this opportunity to be part of a unique Welsh-American cultural event.

For additional information, please contact me directly and/or visit the websites and links below.

Yn ddiffuant/sincerely,

Dulais Rhys, Ph.D

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WEBSITES and LINKS

Dulais Rhys Résumé

<http://dulaisrhysmusicservices.com/resume.htm>

Blodwen

<http://dulaisrhysmusicservices.com/blodwen.htm>

Joseph Parry

<http://josephparry.org>