

Leslie De'Ath, Associate Editor

Singing in Welsh: A Guide to Lyric Diction

Rachel Schutz



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POETRY HAS BEEN AN INTEGRAL PART of Welsh culture from at least the middle of the sixth century onward when *cerdd* meant both “song” and “poem.”¹ This is one reason that vocal music is so dominant in Wales. Indeed, the *bardd* (bard) was an important and highly decorated member of the Court, and to this day, the highest honor conferred at the National *Eisteddfod* (arts festival) is to a poet.² The Welsh language, therefore, is integral to the preservation of culture and national identity, a fact that partially explains why Wales has had relative success at its attempts at language revitalization and preservation.³ The language, however, has also been one of the reasons why Welsh art song has not penetrated far beyond its borders. Welsh, a Celtic language distantly related to Scottish Gaelic and Irish, can seem intimidating to the nonspeaker, and thus, without access to native speakers and without readily available translations and transcriptions, Wales’s vocal music has been confined to its home country. This article aims to correct that unfortunate situation by offering an introductory guide to Welsh language, phonetics, and lyric diction.

WELSH LINGUISTIC HISTORY

Welsh, a Celtic language on the Brythonic branch, is most closely related to Cornish and Breton, two languages spoken by very few people in Cornwall, England and Brittany, France, respectively.⁴ Welsh is spoken by roughly 20% of people in Wales and a handful of people in Patagonia, Argentina,⁵ though many more have a working knowledge of the language through compulsory language education in school.⁶

Welsh linguistic history is very much intertwined with Wales’s political history. Until Roman arrival to Britain around 50 BC, Celtic languages were the only ones spoken on the British Isles. After the appearance of the Romans, and subsequently the Anglo Saxons around 450 AD, the Celts were pushed to the fringes of the islands (what is now Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and Cornwall), where they remained largely unassimilated by the conquering civilizations even through the Norman conquest of 1066.⁷ In 1542, Henry VIII of England officially annexed Wales and exported his new brand of Protestantism to the region. The publication of the first Welsh language Bible and the establishment of circulating Welsh language schools, helped Welsh flourish and gain in stature.⁸ It was also the language of choice for the new

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nonconformist churches (Methodist and Presbyterian), which saw a considerable revival in the nineteenth century and served as a center for Welsh culture.⁹

However, with the onset of the Industrial Revolution, English administration and control of the region increased. Migration, paired with newly designed education policies, had devastating effects on the language.¹⁰ It is estimated that in 1800, 80% of people in Wales spoke Welsh;¹¹ by 1911, around 50% did;¹² and the 2011 census reported that only 19% of people in Wales were Welsh-speaking¹³ (though that estimate is likely to be low).¹⁴ Despite this, and perhaps even because of this decline, the Welsh language has remained a central part of retaining Welsh culture and heritage.¹⁵

Welsh has a number of interesting linguistic features, though most important to lyric diction are the different registers and dialects of the language. There are three accepted registers of Welsh: literary, formal/educated, and colloquial, each differing in syntax, vocabulary, morphology, and phonology.¹⁶ Two major spoken dialects, Northern and Southern Welsh, also exist and vary in vocabulary, syntax, and phonetics.¹⁷ Unlike British or American English, where a “standard” or neutral form of speech is recognized (Received Pronunciation and Standard American English, respectively), a controversial standard Welsh or *Cymraeg Byw* (living Welsh) is far less firmly established and was initially codified as an instrument for language education.¹⁸ A standard pronunciation does seem to be slowly emerging in formal, public spheres like broadcasting (partly in tandem with said education policies), and rather than leaning toward one dialect or the other, it aims for full phonetic realizations of the written form.¹⁹

Due to the lack of a well established standard language, in this article I have had to make choices. Those have been made on the basis of what most closely resembles the orthography (and thus the “standard”), what English speakers might best be able to produce, and what singing considerations must be taken into account. Generally speaking, the Northern variety maintains most phonetic coherence between the written and spoken forms and thus will serve as our basic model.²⁰ However, the Southern vowel system is less complex and easier for English speakers to pronounce. I have therefore chosen to use it here as the basis for the vowels of Welsh lyric diction.

A final area of interest is the prevalence of borrowed words in Welsh. Welsh has been in close contact with English for centuries, and consequently has adopted many English words into its vocabulary. When words are loaned to Welsh, their sounds are frequently loaned as well.

WELSH PHONOLOGY AND PHONETICS

An effort was made in the early twentieth century to codify the spelling of Welsh, the result of which is that Welsh is largely what nonlinguists would call a *phonetic* language.²¹ Welsh uses the Roman alphabet as the basis for its orthography, but has made additions and changes to it. Once these changes are understood, the language is quite phonetic.²² Welsh has some non-English sounds that will be familiar to those that have sung in Parisian French ([χ]) and Russian ([i]), as well as some unfamiliar sounds such as the voiceless trill [r̥], the lateral fricative [ɬ], and voiceless nasal consonants [ɲ], [ɱ], and [ɳ]. Like German, Welsh employs vowel length distinctions that are contrastive (affecting the meaning of the word), and it sometimes uses a diacritical mark [ˆ] to indicate length. The Welsh alphabet also utilizes several digraphs (two letters that represent one sound): *ch*, *dd*, *ff*, *ng*, *ll*, *ph*, *rh*, and *th*. These digraphs represent one distinct sound, though unlike most languages, they *do* appear in the alphabet as a letter and thus also in the dictionary.²³

The Welsh Alphabet

The Welsh alphabet appears in the following order: *a b c ch d dd e fff g ng h i j l ll m n o p ph r rh s t th u w y*. Note: there is no *k*, *x*, or *z*, the placement of *ng* is unexpected, and *j* is employed only in loan words. As mentioned, the digraphs appear in the alphabet itself and this must be taken into account when using a traditional dictionary. Figures 1 and 2 show the sounds of Welsh and their placement on the International Phonetic Alphabet vowel and consonant charts, respectively.²⁴

Diacritical Marks

Welsh has two principal diacritical marks: the circumflex [ˆ] and the diaeresis [¨]. The circumflex is used to indicate vowel length (see “Vowel Length” below); the diaeresis indicates the syllabic separation of two adjacent vowels. For instance, *ion* would be pronounced [ˈjo:n], but the addition of the diaeresis on the first vowel sepa-

| | | |
|--------|--------|----|
| i: | i:*/i* | u: |
| ɪ | | ʊ |
| e: | ə | o: |
| ɛ | | ɔ |
| a: / a | | |

Figure 1. The vowels of Welsh in IPA (*appear in Northern Welsh only).

rates the initial vowels into two syllables producing *ïon* [i:ɔn] “ion.” Welsh has two more diacritical marks that are used very sparingly: the grave [`] and acute [´] accents. The grave accent is used to denote a short vowel, especially in monosyllables, so that, for example, *còg* [kʰɔg] “cog” and *cog* [kʰo:ɡ] “cuckoo” are differentiated, while the acute accent is used to denote a stressed final syllable that is simultaneously a short vowel, for example *ffarwél* [far'wél] “farewell.”²⁵

Stress

Stress almost always occurs on the penultimate syllable in Welsh; however, as in all languages, there are exceptions. Stress is on the final syllable for verbs ending in -(h)au (*ca'sáu* “to hate” or *mwyn'hau* “to enjoy”); in some words where the vowels have merged into a diphthong (*Cym'raeg* “Welsh”), some adverbs that were originally two words (*ym'laen* “forward”); and for most words beginning with *ys-*, *ym-*, and *yngh-* (*y'sgrech* “scream,” *ym'hell* “far,” and *ynghyd* “together”).²⁶ Additionally, emphatic personal pronouns usually have stress on the final syllable (*my'fi*, *ty'di*, *hy'ni*, *e'fe*, *ny'ni*, *chwy'chi*, *hwynt'hwy*).²⁷ Finally, stress can vary for foreign words accord-

ing to that language and in certain exception words such as *mam-'gu* “grandmother” and *pen-'glin* “knee.” Often, a circumflex [^] will be used on long vowel (*bri'gâd* “brigade”) and an acute accent [´] will be used on a short vowel (*ffar'wél* “farewell”) to indicate irregular stress.

Vowel Length

Most Welsh vowels appear in pairs of long and short and the quality of the vowel changes along with the length, so that closed vowels appear mostly as long vowels and open vowels appear mostly as short vowels (apart from /a/ and /i/ which do not change in quality). Only [ə] is unpaired and is always short. The constraints that determine vowel length involve stress, diacritical marks, and phonotactics.

Multisyllabic words in Welsh employ only short vowels (though there are exceptions), so vowel length is at play only when dealing with monosyllabic words.²⁸ Here vowels can be long/closed or short/open depending on the circumstances, and vowel length is contrastive (e.g., *ar* [ar] “on” vs. *âr* [a:r] “arrable”). The circumflex is used in such instances, but for some words where there is no short or long counterpart, it is omitted (for instance in *tir* [ti:r] “land”), thus making its use somewhat inconsistent.

Vowels in unstressed position (both in unstressed monosyllables and multisyllabic words) only appear as short and open, for example, *allan* [aʎan] “open,” *anferth* [anvərθ] “huge,” and *am* [am] “for.” In stressed position, however, the sound following the vowel determines length. In monosyllables, when a vowel is followed by a consonant cluster, the vowel is short and open; however, when it is followed by a single consonant, the kind of

Figure 2. The consonants of Welsh in an adapted IPA chart

| | Bilabial | Labio-dental | Dental | Alveolar | Lateral | Palato-alveolar | Palatal | Velar | Uvular | Glottal |
|-------------------------|----------|--------------|--------|----------|---------|-----------------|---------|-------|--------|---------|
| Stops | p b | | | t d | | | | k g | | |
| Affricates [†] | | | | | | tʃ dʒ | | | | |
| Fricatives | | f v | θ ð | s z | ɬ | ʃ | | | χ | h |
| Liquids | | | ɹ r | | l | | | | | |
| Nasals | m̥ m | | n̥ n | | | | | ŋ̊ ŋ | | |
| Glides | w | | | | | | j | | | |

(As in the IPA chart, the symbols on the left indicate voiceless sounds. [†]Occur in loan-words only.)

FIGURE 3. Vowel length in stressed monosyllables.

| Vowel followed by: | Length | Examples |
|--|---------------|--|
| Consonant cluster | Short | <i>pont</i> ['p ^h ɔnt] “bridge” <i>gwallt</i> ['gwaɫt] “hair” |
| Voiceless Stops: <i>p</i> /p/, <i>t</i> /t/, <i>c</i> /k/ and <i>m</i> [m], <i>ng</i> [ŋ] | Short | <i>toc</i> ['t ^h ɔk] “soon” <i>pam</i> ['p ^h am] “why” |
| Voiced Stop: <i>b</i> [b], <i>d</i> [d], <i>g</i> [g] | Long | <i>mab</i> ['ma:b] “son” <i>cig</i> ['k ^h i:g] “meat” |
| Fricative: <i>ff</i> [f], <i>th</i> [θ], <i>s</i> [s], <i>ch</i> [χ], <i>f</i> [v], <i>dd</i> [ð], <i>ll</i> [ɬ] | Long | <i>hoff</i> ['ho:f] “favorite” <i>dydd</i> ['di:ð] “day” <i>bach</i> ['ba:χ] “small” |
| Liquids: <i>r</i> /r/, <i>l</i> [l] and <i>n</i> [n] | Short or Long | <i>gwyn</i> ['gwin] “white” <i>gwin</i> ['gwi:n] “wine” <i>byr</i> ['bir] “short” <i>pur</i> ['pi:r] “pure” |
| Zero (open syllable) | Long | <i>ci</i> ['k ^h i:] “dog” <i>lle</i> ['ɬe:] “place” |

consonant determines vowel length. A vowel followed by a voiceless stop (*p* /p/, *t* /t/, *c* /k/) ²⁹ or by *m* [m] and *ng* [ŋ] is short, while a vowel followed by a voiced stop (*b* [b], *d* [d], *g* [g]) or fricative (*ff* [f], *th* [θ], *s* [s], *ch* [χ], *f* [v], *dd* [ð], *ll* [ɬ]) is long. Liquids (*r* /r/ and *l* [l]) and the remaining nasal *n* [n] cause the previous vowel to be either long or short and sometimes the circumflex will be employed to make this distinction (*môr* ['mo:r] “sea” vs. *mor* ['mɔr] “how/so”). ³⁰ Beyond this, there is no easy way to determine length in these situations, so a dictionary with phonetic transcription or speaker must be referenced. If the stressed vowel is in an open syllable (i.e., not followed by a consonant), it is long and closed. Figure 3 offers a summary of vowel length rules for stressed monosyllabic words and some example words for illustration. ³¹

As mentioned, in multisyllabic words, vowels are generally short regardless of what the following consonants are, for example, *athro* ['aθrɔ] “teacher,” *eisteddodd* [ɛi'st^hɛðɔð] “I sat,” and *archfarchnad* [arχ'varχnad] “supermarket.” Some exceptions occur with borrowed words, and may be indicated by the use of the circumflex to indicate stress and length, for instance *racŵn* [ra'k^hu:n] “raccoon.” ³² Another exception is when two vowels appear together but don't form a diphthong (see “Welsh Diphthongs” below). In this case, the first vowel

is long, while the second is short, for instance *bwa* ['bu:a] “bow” and *rheol* ['re:ɔl] “rule.”

Finally, it is important to remember that the central vowel [ə] does not participate in this process as it does not have a long counterpart, and that the /a/ and /i/ vowels can be long or short according to these rules, but that the quality does not change. While these vowel length rules are complicated, they are vital to correct pronunciation as they affect vowel quality in addition to length.

WORD-INITIAL CONSONANT MUTATION

Like other Celtic languages, Welsh has word-initial consonant mutation. This means that under certain syntactic, morphological, and phonological circumstances, the initial consonant of the word changes but the word meaning does not. ³³ This change is depicted in the spelling, so, while for singing diction purposes it is not important to understand *why* and *when* these mutations occur, it is vital to know what the mutation patterns are so that words may be looked up accurately in a dictionary. Many online dictionaries are able to take mutation into account, but in traditional paper dictionaries, the root version of the word must be looked up rather than its mutated version.

Figure 4. List of mutations in Welsh by spelling/IPA and mutation type.*

| Original spelling/IPA | SM | NM | AM |
|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------------|
| <i>c</i> / [k] | <i>g</i> / [g] | <i>ngh</i> / [ŋ] | <i>ch</i> / [χ] |
| <i>p</i> / [p] | <i>b</i> / [b] | <i>mh</i> / [m̥] | <i>ph</i> / [f] |
| <i>t</i> / [t] | <i>d</i> / [d] | <i>nh</i> / [n̥] | <i>th</i> / [θ] |
| <i>g</i> / [g] | Ø (disappears) | <i>ng</i> / [ŋ] | - |
| <i>b</i> / [b] | <i>f</i> / [v] | <i>m</i> / [m] | - |
| <i>d</i> / [d] | <i>dd</i> / [ð] | <i>n</i> / [n] | - |
| <i>m</i> / [m] | <i>f</i> / [v] | - | (<i>mh</i> / [m̥]) |
| <i>ll</i> / [l̪] | <i>l</i> / [l] | - | - |
| <i>rh</i> / [r̥] | <i>r</i> / [r] | - | - |
| <i>n</i> / [n] | - | - | (<i>nh</i> / [n̥]) |

- (1) *ci* ['kʰi] “dog” SM: *gi* ['gi] NM: *nghi* ['ŋi] AM: *chi* ['χi]
gwallt ['gwaɫt] “hair” SM: *wallt* ['waɫt] NM: *ngwallt* ['ŋwaɫt] AM: -
mam ['mam] “mother” SM: *fam* ['vam] NM: - AM: *mham* ['m̥am]

*Adapted from King, *Modern Welsh*, 15.

There are three kinds of mutation in Welsh: soft mutation (SM), which occurs most frequently, nasal mutation (NM), and aspirate mutation (AM). Each one creates a different type of sound change as dictated by different circumstances, but it is important to remember that this sound change does not affect meaning. Only consonants undergo mutation, and in fact, not all consonants can be affected by mutation, nor do these consonants undergo all types of mutations. Figure 4 provides a summary of the mutations according to type and letter, along with some example words and their mutations.

WELSH VOWELS

The Welsh alphabet has seven vowel letters: *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, *w*, *y*, and each of these letters can be given the aforementioned diacritical marks. When vowels appear adjacent to one another, but do not form diphthongs (see below), the second vowel is open. Both long/closed and short/open vowels will be described, but the vowel length rules outlined above must be applied in order to determine whether an open or closed vowel is to be used.

A

The letter *a* can be pronounced as long [a:] or short [a]. In unstressed position, the vowel quality remains and

never gets reduced to [ə]. It can appear alone, as part of a diphthong (see “Diphthongs” below), and can also bear a circumflex (*â*), a dieresis (*ä*), and an acute accent (*á*).

Examples:

- [a:] *bach* ['ba:χ] “small” / *cân* ['kʰa:n] “song”
[a] *cymanfa* [kʰə'manva] “assembly” / *bwytäwr* [bɥi'tʰaʊr] “eater” / *casáu* [ka'sai] “to hate”

E

The letter *e* can be pronounced as long [e:] or short [ɛ]. It can appear alone, as part of a diphthong, and can also bear a circumflex (*ê*), a dieresis (*ë*), and an acute accent (*é*).

Examples:

- [e:] *ef* ['e:v] “him” / *peth* ['pʰe:θ] “thing” / *sêr* ['se:r] “star”
[ɛ] *welë* ['wɛɛ] “behold” / *ymbarél* [ɔmba'rɛl] “umbrella” / *dilëydd* [dɪ'lɛið] “eraser”

I

The letter *i* can be pronounced as long [i:] or short [ɪ], and as a glide [j]. It can appear alone, as part of a diphthong, and can also bear a circumflex (*î*), a dieresis (*ï*), and an acute accent (*í*). While unstressed *i* is usually pronounced as [ɪ], it is frequently pronounced as a short

tense vowel [i] in word-final position. Additionally, *i* is silent when following an *s* in the same syllable (see “Fricatives” below).

If the letter *i* is in syllable-initial position and followed by another vowel, it becomes a glide [j] (e.g., *iawn* [ˈjaʊn] “well”). If, however, it does not appear in syllable-initial position and is followed by another vowel, it is a stressed [i:] (e.g., *diolch* [ˈdi:ɔɫχ] “thank you”). Determining whether *i* appears syllable-initially naturally depends on correct syllabification, so word stem and suffix issues must be taken into account. The musical setting will also help to determine if the *i* vowel is syllabic or consonantal.

Examples:

- [i:] *idd* [ˈi:ð] “to” / *hir* [ˈhi:r] “long” / *elît* [ɛˈli:t] “elite” / *difriô* [divˈri:ɔ] “abuse”
- [ɪ] *impio* [ˈɪmpjɔ] “bud” / *bir* [ˈbɪr] “short” / *diddorol* [dɪˈðɔrɔɫ] “interesting”
- [i] *cochi* [ˈkʰɔχɪ] “to cook” / *arholi* [arˈhɔli] “to examine”
- [j] *iechid* [ˈjɛχɪd] “health” / *geiriadur* [gɛɪrˈjadɪr] “dictionary”

O

The letter *o* can be pronounced as long [o:] or short [ɔ]. It can appear alone, and as part of a diphthong, and can also bear a circumflex (ô), a dieresis (ö), and a grave accent (ò).

Examples:

- [o:] *oll* [oːɫ] “all” / *dod* [ˈdo:d] “coming” / *tôn* [ˈtʰo:n] “tune” / *egöydd* [ɛˈgo:ɪð] “egoist”
- [ɔ] *porth* [ˈpʰɔrθ] “door” / *hofio* [ˈhɔvjɔ] “hoe” / *clôs* [ˈkʰlɔs] “close”

U

The letter *u* is pronounced differently in North and South Wales. In South Wales, it is pronounced exactly the same as the letter *i* and follows the same length and occurrence rules (though it does not appear in glide form). In North Wales, however, it can be pronounced as long [i:] and short [ɪ]. I *strongly* advise that a South-Walian pronunciation be the choice while singing. It is difficult for some non-Welsh speakers to produce the North-Walian version of this letter correctly, and the discomfort paired with the tenseness of the vowel can

lead to less than ideal singing. Thus, I will describe this vowel according to Southern Welsh rules.³⁴

The letter *u* can appear alone, and as part of a diphthong, and can also bear a circumflex (û) (though it is very rare) and a dieresis (ü). Like *i*, final unstressed *u* is usually short but tense [i].

Examples:

- [i:] *un* [ˈi:n] “one” / *hufen* [ˈhi:vɛn] “cream” / *llu* [ˈɫi:] “color” / *düwch* [di:ʊχ] “blackness”
- [ɪ] *caru* [ˈkʰari] “to love” / *adeiladu* [adɛjˈladi] “to build”
- [ɪ] *urdd* [ˈɪrð] “guild” / *pump* [ˈpʰɪmp] “five” / *modur* [ˈmɔɪr] “motor”

W

The letter *w* can be pronounced as long [u:] or short [ʊ] and as a glide [w]. The vowel can appear alone, as part of a diphthong, and it can also bear a circumflex (ŵ). If the letter *w* is in syllable-initial position or following a *g*, and is followed by another vowel, it becomes a glide [w] (e.g., *wedi* [ˈwɛdi] “after”). If, however, it does not appear in syllable-initial position (other than following *g*) and is followed by another vowel, the letter *w* is stressed and is produced as a long, tense [u:] (e.g., *rŵan* [ˈru:an] “now”). [w] occurs most commonly following the letter *g* and can even appear in the middle of a consonant cluster as in *gwneud* [ˈɡwɛɪd] “to make.”

Examples:

- [u:] *drws* [ˈdru:s] “door” / *mwg* [ˈmu:g] “smoke” / *dŵr* [ˈdu:r] “water” / *tatŵ* [tʰaˈtʰu:] “tattoo”
- [ʊ] *wrth* [ˈʊrθ] “against” / *trwm* [ˈtʰrʊm] “heavy” / *hwnnw* [ˈhʊn:u] “that one”
- [w] *werth* [ˈwɛrθ] “worth” / *gwallt* [ˈɡwaɫt] “hair” / *gwýdd* [ˈɡwi:ð] “wild”

Y

The letter *y* is the only vowel that varies in quality beyond length considerations. It can have several different pronunciations. The first is as a short, mid vowel: the schwa [ə]. The second is like the letter *u*, and thus differs between North and South Wales. In South Wales [i:] and [ɪ] are used, while in North Wales [i:] and [ɪ] are used. Again, I recommend using the South Walian pronunciation.

Figure 5. Diphthongs that move to [i].

| Sound | Spelling | Example words |
|-------|---------------|---|
| [aj] | <i>ae</i> | <i>ael</i> [ajl] “brow” / <i>gwaed</i> [ˈgwaɪd] “blood” Exceptions: <i>aeron</i> [ˈeɪrɔn] “berries” / <i>daear</i> [ˈdɛjar] “earth” |
| | <i>ai</i> | <i>ail</i> [ˈaɪl] “second” / <i>sain</i> [ˈsaɪn] “sound” |
| | <i>au</i> | <i>aur</i> [ˈaɪr] “gold” / <i>haul</i> [ˈhaɪl] “sun” |
| [ɛi] | <i>ei</i> | <i>tei</i> [ˈtʰɛi] “tie” / <i>breichiau</i> [ˈbrɛɪχjaɪ] “arms” |
| | <i>eu</i> | <i>euog</i> [ˈɛɪɔg] “guilty” / <i>neud</i> [ˈnɛɪd] “to make” |
| [ɔi] | <i>oe</i> | <i>oer</i> [ˈɔɪr] “cold” / <i>coed</i> [ˈkʰɔɪd] “trees” |
| | <i>oi</i> | <i>troi</i> [ˈtʰrɔɪ] “turn” / <i>ffoi</i> [ˈfɔɪ] “to flee” |
| [ʊi] | <i>wy/wŷy</i> | <i>wyth</i> [ˈʊɪθ] “eight” / <i>llwyd</i> [ˈlʷɪd] “grey” / <i>mwy</i> [ˈmʊɪ] “more” Exceptions: <i>g+wy</i> : <i>gwyrdd</i> [ˈgwɪrð] “green” |

Figure 6. Diphthongs that move to [ʊ].

| Sound | Spelling | Example Words |
|-------|-----------------|--|
| [aʊ] | <i>aw</i> | <i>Awst</i> [ˈaʊst] “August” / <i>brawd</i> [ˈbraʊd] “brother” |
| [ɛʊ] | <i>ew</i> | <i>tew</i> [ˈtʰɛʊ] “fat” / <i>llewa</i> [ˈlɛʊa] “to devour” |
| [ɪʊ] | <i>iw</i> | <i>lliw</i> [ˈlɪʊ] “color” / <i>niwl</i> [ˈnɪʊl] “fog” |
| | <i>-yw</i> | <i>byw</i> [ˈbɪʊ] “to live” / <i>cyw</i> [ˈkʰɪʊ] “chick” |
| [əʊ] | <i>yw + C/V</i> | <i>tywallt</i> [ˈtʰəʊaɪt] “to pour” / <i>llywodraeth</i> [lɪʊˈɔdraɪθ] “government” |

The letter *y* can appear alone, and as part of a diphthong, and can also bear a circumflex (*ŷ*). If the letter *y* appears in the last syllable of a word, or in a monosyllable, it is pronounced as the letter *u* is (i.e., as [iː]/[ɪ] in the South and /i/ in the North). Additionally, when *y* appears as part of a diphthong, it usually acts as the letter *u* does. In all other situations, the schwa [ə] is used. There are, however, some exceptions to this rule, for instance in some common monosyllables: *fy* [və] “my,” *dy* “your,” *y* “the,” *yr* “the,” *yn* “in,” and *syr* “sir,” which are all pronounced using the schwa.

Examples:

- [ə] *ysgol* [ˈəsɡɔl] “school” / *llygad* [ˈlɛɡad] “eye” / *hydref* [ˈhədɾɛv] “autumn” / *fy* [və] “my”
- [iː] *dyn* [ˈdiːn] “man” / *hŷn* [ˈhiːn] “old” / *tŷ* [ˈtʰiː] “house” / *ysbyty* [əˈsbətʰi] “hospital”
- [ɪ] *bryn* [ˈbrɪn] “hill” / *plentyn* [ˈplɛntʰɪn] “children” / *gofyn* [ˈɡɔvɪn] “to ask”

WELSH DIPHTHONGS

In South Wales, there are two groups of diphthongs; in North Wales, there are three. Both dialects use diphthongs that move to [i] and [ʊ] (see Figures 5 and 6), while the Northern dialect also has diphthongs that move to [i].³⁵ As with monophthongs, I will detail the Southern diphthong patterns here.³⁶ Surprisingly, diphthongs are usually short in Welsh, and some have several different spellings, while others have only one. If vowels appear adjacently in combinations other than those listed above, then they form two separate syllables, for example, *huan* [ˈhiːan] “sun” and *bwa* [ˈbuːa] “bow.”

Most diphthongs are pronounced as would be expected from their monophthong vowel counterparts. There are some dialect variations in both Northern and Southern Welsh, but the standard is to adhere to the orthography.

The letters *w* and *y* prove complicated within the context of diphthongs. To begin, the spelling *wy* can be pronounced as a diphthong [ʊɪ] or as a glide [w] +

vowel. In most situations, *wy* is pronounced as a diphthong (*swyn* ['sɔɪn] “charm”), especially if the *w* has a circumflex (*gŵyl* ['gɔɪl] “festival”). However, when *wy* follows *g*, the *w* becomes a glide (*gwynt* ['gwɪnt] “wind”). Additionally, as a reminder, if the *y* of a [w]+*y* combination appears with a circumflex, then the following vowel is a long and tense [i:] (*gŵydd* ['gwi:ð] “wild”), otherwise the vowel is short and lax [ɪ] (*gwyn* ['gwin] “white”).

Likewise, the reverse combination of *yw* is complicated. When *yw* is in an open syllable, the diphthong [ɪʊ] is produced as in *rhyw* ['rɪʊ] “gender/some” (note that the stem remains the same when a suffix is added as in *rhywbeth* ['rɪʊbɛθ] “something”). Conversely, when *yw* is followed by another sound, a diphthong [əʊ] is produced as in *cywladu* [kʰəʊ'ladi] “to naturalize.”

WELSH CONSONANTS

Most consonants in Welsh are pronounced as would be expected by English speakers, though they are more consistent and phonetic than in English. As indicated earlier, there are eight digraphs: *ch*, *dd*, *ff*, *ng*, *ll*, *ph*, *rh*, and *th*, which will be outlined below.

Stops: *p* = [p^h]/[p], *t* = [t^h]/[t], *c* = [k^h]/[k], *b* = [b], *d* = [d], *g* = [g]

The voiceless stops in Welsh (*p*, *t*, *c*) are aspirated in all positions except final, thus creating [p^h], [t^h] and [k^h] word-initially and medially, and [p], [t], [k] word-finally.³⁷ The voiceless stops [b], [d], [g] are often devoiced when speaking, especially in final position, but when singing, full voicing is more desirable.

Affricates: *j* = [dʒ], *tch*/*tsi* = [dʒ]

[tʃ] and [dʒ] are not native sounds to Welsh, though they are used in plenty of borrowed words. [dʒ] has its own letter spelling (*j*) as in *jam* ['dʒam] “jam,” but [tʃ] does not. It can sometimes be spelled as *tsi* or *tch*, as in *tsips* ['tʃɪps] “chips” and *cwtch* ['kʰɒtʃ] “safe space.”³⁸

Fricatives: *ch* = [χ], *dd* = [ð], *f* = [v], *ff* = [f], *h* = [h], *ll* = [ɬ], *ph* = [f], *s* = [s], *si* = [ʃ], *th* = [θ]

Most fricatives are produced as expected, though it is worth pointing out that *ch* [χ] really is uvular in production, not velar. The only variation that occurs is with the letter *s*. It is pronounced as [s] in most situations, except when followed by *i* in syllable-initial position.

The *si* combination produces [ʃ], where the *i* is silent (*siop* ['ʃɔp] “shop”).

The production of the lateral fricative *ll* [ɬ] is not as difficult as it might seem. Place the tongue as if saying *l*, and then send air down the sides of the tongue. It does sound similar to [ç], but the important difference is that air travels down the *sides* of the tongue, not the center.

Liquids: *l* = [l], *r* = [r]/[ɾ], *rh* = [ɾ]

rh [ɾ] is a voiceless rolled [r]. It is not a difficult sound to produce if one is already able to produce [r]: simply roll the *r* without vocal fold phonation. Additionally, *r* can be either rolled [r] or flipped [ɾ]. Generally, it is flipped in intervocalic position and when accompanied by another consonant. This is not a dialect or language-wide rule, however, so discretion can be used as to what is vocally, musically, and expressively most appropriate.

Nasals: *ng* = [ŋ], *ngh* = [ŋ̥], *m* = [m], *mh* = [m̥], *n* = [n], *nh* = [n̥]

Another hallmark of Welsh is the voiceless nasal consonants. They appear only word-initially as a result of nasal mutation (NM) and are spelled with the addition of an *h* after the nasal consonant (*mh*, *nh*, *ngh*). They can be pronounced as voiceless nasals [ŋ̥], [m̥], [n̥] or as voiced nasals immediately followed by [h] as in [mh], [nh], and [ŋh].³⁹ Either method is acceptable in spoken Welsh, so I would encourage the singer to experiment and find the method of production that best fits their voice. The voiceless nasals are produced by shaping the vocal tract for normal voiced nasal consonants ([m], [n], and [ŋ]), but not engaging the vocal folds for vibration. The result sounds like air being blown through the nose with different points of closure in the mouth.

Voiced nasals in Welsh behave mostly phonetically, except for *ng*. Like English, it can be difficult to determine if an *ng* should be pronounced as the digraph [ŋ] (*angen* ['aŋen] “to need” or as [ŋg] *dangos* ['daŋgɔs] “to show” (i.e., as two separate letters *n* and *g*, where the *n* assimilates to the placement of the *g*). A dictionary should be referenced in these circumstances.

Glottal stop: Like English and German, the glottal stop [ʔ] does not appear as a letter in the alphabet in Welsh but is used in the language before vowel-initial words. My recommendation would be to use it sparingly for expressive purposes only and certainly not before every vowel-initial word.

Dialect variation: As with any language, there are dialectic conventions and variations as well as colloquialisms that should be avoided in singing diction unless a particular dialect affect is desired. In spoken Welsh, final voiced fricatives (*f* [v] and *dd* [ð]) are frequently dropped, producing ['k^hartre] instead of ['k^hartrev] (*cartref* “home”) and [fɔr] instead of [fɔrð] (*ffordd* “way”).⁴⁰ In sung Welsh, these final fricatives should be fully pronounced. Additionally, the plural noun ending *-au* [ai] is often produced as [ɛ] in spoken Welsh but should have its full diphthong realization in sung Welsh (for example, *ffrindiau* “friends” [frɪndjɛ] vs. [frɪndjai]).

EXPRESSIVE USE OF DICTION IN WELSH

A final area of discussion is how diction can be used to enliven expression in Welsh. The principal vehicle for bringing attention to certain words is consonant length. Like German, Welsh consonants can be lengthened for expressive purposes. Initial consonants can be lengthened before the beat, while orthographically doubled consonants and voiceless stops when preceded by a stressed vowel can also be doubled. Remember never to lengthen a consonant following a long vowel, however. The choice of whether to lengthen a consonant must be made on the basis of how important a word is in the text. Singers must be careful not to overuse this technique, both so as not to interrupt the legato singing line, and so as not to dilute its power. Finally, glottal stops can be added to important vowel-initial words both to highlight them and to set them apart from previous words, though this should be used sparingly, and less than would be used in German.

CREATING IPA TRANSCRIPTIONS

The following will serve as a guide for creating IPA transcriptions of Welsh texts.

1. To begin, write out the poem in Welsh:
Cariwch, medd Dafydd, fy nhelyn i mi,
2. Determine word stress:
'Cariwch, 'medd 'Dafydd, fy 'nhelyn i 'mi,
3. Next, transcribe only the consonants, bearing in mind the consonant rules described above:

[k^h r χ m ð d v ð v ŋ l n m]
Cariwch, medd Dafydd, fy nhelyn i mi,

4. Then, determine if any *i* or *u* vowels are actually glides by assessing if they appear syllable-initially:

[k^h rj χ m ð d v ð v ŋ l n m]
Cariwch, medd Dafydd, fy nhelyn i mi,

5. Determine vowel length for monosyllables by applying the rules described above:

[k^h rj χ m :ð d v ð v ŋ l n m :]
Cariwch, medd Dafydd, fy nhelyn i mi,

6. Based on vowel length, determine and insert correct vowel:

[k^harjɔχ 'me:ð 'davið və 'ŋɛlɪn i 'mi:]
Cariwch, medd Dafydd, fy nhelyn i mi,

7. Look for any opportunities where expressive consonant lengthening could occur:

[k^harjɔχ 'me:ð 'davið və 'ŋ:ɛlɪn i 'mi:]
Cariwch, medd Dafydd, fy nhelyn i mi,

RESOURCES

A number of resources are available both online and in printed format for further study of Welsh diction and language. Among the most important resources for any singer is a good dictionary. The *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*⁴¹ is the foremost historical dictionary and their online version is an excellent resource. One dictionary with phonetic transcriptions does exist (*The Welsh Learners Dictionary*),⁴² but it does not employ IPA and does not offer vowel length distinctions, so care should be taken when using it as a reference. Also invaluable are recordings. Perhaps Wales's most famous singer is Bryn Terfel, a native Welsh-speaker himself. His recordings of Welsh vocal music are a wonderful place to start to explore both the repertoire and diction.⁴³ Other tireless promoters of Welsh vocal music, particularly of the art song genre, are Jeremy Huw Williams⁴⁴ (a native Welsh speaker) and Elin Manahan Thomas.⁴⁵

NOTES

1. Phyllis Kinney, *Welsh Traditional Music* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 1-2.

2. Ibid; and *Britanica Academic*, "Eisteddfod"; <https://academic-eb-com.ezproxy.ithaca.edu/levels/collegiate/article/eisteddfod/32170> (accessed February 25, 2019).
3. C. H. Williams, "The Lightning Veil: Language Revitalization in Wales," *Review of Research in Education* 38, no. 1 (2014): 242–272; <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X13512983>.
4. A group of Celts also migrated across the English Channel to what is now Brittany, France, which is the reason Breton exists where it does.
5. A group of Welsh emigres settled in Argentina in 1865 and a number of native Welsh speakers still remain in the area.
6. S. J. Hannahs, *The Phonology of Welsh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7–11; Megan Jones, *Research Briefing: Welsh-Medium Education and Welsh as a Subject* (Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales Research Service, 2016), 1; <http://www.assembly.wales/research%20documents/rs16-048/16-048-english-web.pdf>.
7. *Britanica Academic*, "Wales"; <https://academic-eb-com.ezproxy.ithaca.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Wales/110755> (accessed February 25, 2019); *Britanica Academic*, "United Kingdom"; <https://academic-eb-com.ezproxy.ithaca.edu/levels/collegiate/article/United-Kingdom/110750#214519.toc> (accessed February 25, 2019).
8. *Britanica Academic*, "Wales"
9. Ibid.
10. Robert Thomas Jenkins, "The Development of Nationalism in Wales," *The Sociological Review* 27, no. 2 (1935): 163–182; Kenneth O. Morgan, "Welsh Nationalism: The Historical Background," *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 1 (1971): 153–172.
11. Robert D. Borsley, Maggie Tallerman, and David Willis, *The Syntax of Welsh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3.
12. R. Merfyn Jones, "Beyond Identity? The Reconstruction of the Welsh," *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 4 (1992): 330–357.
13. "2011 Census: Statistics for Wales, March 2011," UK Office for National Statistics, last modified December 11, 2012; <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulation-andcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/2011censuskeystatisticsforwales/2012-12-11#proficiency-in-welsh>.
14. Dyfan Sion and Martin Parry, *Welsh language Use in Wales, 2013–2015* (Cardiff: Welsh Government and Welsh Language Commissioner, 2015); <http://www.comisiynyddygymraeg.cymru/English/Publications%20List/Adroddiad%20-%20Y%20defnydd%20o%27r%20Gymraeg%20yng%20Nghymru,%202013-15%20-%20Saesneg.pdf>.
15. Kenneth O. Morgan, "Welsh Nationalism: The Historical Background," *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 1 (1971): 153–172; Susan R. Pitchford, "Image-Making Movements: Welsh Nationalism and Stereotype Transformation," *Sociological Perspectives* 44, no. 1 (2001): 45–65.
16. Ceinwen H. Thomas, "Registers in Welsh," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 35 (1982): 87–115.
17. Alan R. Thomas, "A Spoken Standard for Welsh: Description and Pedagogy," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 66 (1987): 99–113.
18. Ibid.; Cennard Davies, "Cymraeg Byw," in Martin J. Ball, ed., *The Use of Welsh: A Contribution to Sociolinguistics*, (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1988), 200.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. I use "phonetic" in a layman, nonlinguistic sense throughout this article.
22. Ibid.
23. For instance, *ch* in German is not in the alphabet, though *ch* in Welsh is considered an orthographic letter.
24. Adapted from Glyn E. Jones, "The Distinctive Vowels and Consonants of Welsh," in Martin Ball and Glyn E. Jones, eds., *Welsh Phonology* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1984), 41, 55; Hannahs, 22–23.
25. H. Meurig Evans, ed., *The Modern Welsh Dictionary* (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1982), 15.
26. Gareth King, *Modern Welsh: A Comprehensive Grammar* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 12; Evans, 15.
27. Evans, 15.
28. Hannahs, 25.
29. I use / / to denote the phonemic iteration of a particular sound (which may have different phonetic realizations) and [] to denote the phonetic manifestation of the sound. For instance, /r/ can be pronounced as both [r] and [r̥] while [l] will only ever be pronounced [l].
30. Hannahs, 25–26.
31. Ibid., 13–27.
32. Ibid., 26
33. Martin J. Ball and Nicole Müller, *Mutation in Welsh* (London: Routledge, 1992), 1.
34. If a Northern variety is desired, however, simply substitute [i:] for [i:] and [i] for [r].
35. Hannahs, 25.
36. For Northern dialect diphthongs, substitute /i/ for /i/ when the diphthong is spelled with a *u* or *y*.

37. Hannahs, 15.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., 18.
40. Ibid.
41. *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, 2014; <http://welsh-dictionary.ac.uk>.
42. Heini Gruffudd, *The Welsh Learners Dictionary* (Aberystwyth: Y Lolfa, 2009).
43. *Songs of my Welsh Home*, Bryn Terfel, baritone (Marquis Classics, 2000); *We'll Keep a Welcome*, Bryn Terfel, baritone, and The Orchestra of Welsh National Opera with Gareth Jones, conductor (Deutsche Grammaphone, 2002).
44. *Caneuon Mansel Thomas*, Jeremy Huw Williams, baritone, and Nigel Foster, piano (Sain, 1999); *Caneuon Jeremy*, Jeremy Huw Williams, baritone, and Nigel Foster, piano (Sain, 2000); *Caneuon Alun Hoddinott*, Jeremy Huw Williams, baritone, and Nigel Foster, piano (Sain, 2002).
45. *Morfydd Owen: Portrait of a Lost Icon*, Elin Manahan Thomas and Brian Ellsby (Tŷ Cerdd, 2016); *Dilys Elwyn-Edwards: Mae hiraeth yn y môr*, Elin Manahan Thomas and Jocelyn Freeman (Tŷ Cerdd, 2018).

Soprano **Rachel Schutz** is an active teacher and performer based in Ithaca, NY. She is an Assistant Professor of Voice at Ithaca College, where she teaches applied voice, art song literature, and performance classes. In 2016 she won first place in the 44th NATS Artist Award Competition. A native of Wales and a Welsh-speaker, she holds degrees in both vocal performance and linguistics.

Dr. Schutz is a seasoned recitalist and concert singer and has been heard at Carnegie Hall's Stern, Weill, and Zankel Halls, the Ravinia, Ojai, Tanglewood, and Yellow Barn Festivals, with the Hawai'i and Riverside Symphony Orchestras, the Orchestra NOW, on the Dame Myra Hess Concert Series, with the Boston Pops Orchestra, and at venues around China, Taiwan, Korea, and Thailand. Dr. Schutz is also active in the opera house, having recently performed with Hawai'i Opera Theatre, Opera Ithaca, Opera Parallèle, Stockton Opera, and the Santa Fe Opera.

As an avid supporter of new music, she can be heard on *Elements*, an Albany Records album of contemporary American music, and has worked with many composers, including Phillip Glass, George Crumb, Milton Babbitt, Jonathan Dove, William Bolcom, Libby Larsen, John Musto, Brett Dean, and Augusta Read-Thomas.

Dr. Schutz holds BA and DMA degrees from Stony Brook University, an MM from Bard College, and an MA in Linguistics from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. (www.rachelschutz.com)

APPENDIX

Sample Transcriptions and Translations

Below is a sample transcription and translation to a popular Welsh hymn, “Calon Lân” (Pure Heart). The text for this Welsh hymn was written by Daniel James (Gwyrosydd) in the 1890s and is sung to the tune “Calon Lân” by John Hughes. It has been made famous as the anthem of the Welsh rugby union and is sung before every test match.

[nɪd ʊːn 'gɔvɪn 'bəʊɪd 'mɔɪθɪs]
1. Nid wy'n gofyn bywyd moethus,
Not am I asking life luxurious,
(I am not asking for a luxurious life,)

['ʔair ə 'biːd naɪ 'berləɪ 'maːn]
Aur y byd na'i berlau mân:
Gold (of) the world nor its pearls fine;
(The world's gold nor its fine pearls;)

['gɔvɪn 'ʊːiv am 'galɒn 'hapʰɪs]
Gofyn wyf am galon hapus,
Ask I am for heart happy,
(I ask only for a happy heart,)

['kʰalɒn 'ɔnɛst 'kʰalɒn 'laːn]
Calon onest, calon lân.
Heart honest, heart pure.
(A honest heart, a pure heart.)

['kʰalɒn 'laːn ən 'ʔaun daɪ'ɔni]
Chorus: Calon lân yn llawn daioni,
Heart pure (is) full (of) goodness
(A pure heart full of goodness,)

['tʰɛkʰaɣ ɪːʊ naːr 'lɪli 'dloːs]
Tecach yw na'r lili dlo:
Fairer is it than the lily pretty
(Fairer than the pretty lily,)

[dɪm ɔnd 'kʰalɒn 'laːn aɪ 'gani]
Dim ond calon lân all ganu
Nothing but heart pure can sing
(Nothing but the purest heart can sing)

['kʰanir 'diːð aː 'χanir 'noːs]
Canu'r dydd a chanu'r nos.
Sing the day and sing the night.
(Sing through the day and sing through the night.)

[pʰeː də'mɪnɔn 'ɔlɪd 'bədɔl]
2. Pe dymunwn olud bydol,
If I wished riches worldly,
(If I wished for worldly riches,)

['hɛdɪn 'biːan 'ganðɔ 'siːð]
Hedyn buan ganddo sydd;
(To) seed would with them become
(They would all go to seed)

['gɔlɪd 'kʰalɒn 'lːan rɪn'wɛðɔl]
Golud calon lân, rinweddol,
Riches heart pure, virtuous
(The riches of a pure and virtuous heart)

[ən 'dɔɪn 'bəθɔl 'ɛlu 'viːð]
Yn dwyn bythol elw fydd.
Will steal eternal profit will it.
(Will eternally profit.)

[Chorus]

['hɔɪr a 'bɔre fə nə'mɪnjad]
3. Hwyr a bore fy nymuniad
Late and morning my wish
(Evening and morning, my wish)

['ɛsgɪ ar a'dɛnɪð 'kʰaːn]
Esgyn ar adenydd cân
Rising on (the) wing (of) song

[ar i 'ðɪʊ ɛr'mɔɪn və 'ŋɛɪdwad]
Ar i Dduw, er mwyn fy Ngheidwad,
To God, for my Salvation
(To God, who is my Salvation)

['rɔði i mi 'galɒn laːn]
Roddi i mi galon lân.
Give to me heart pure.
(Give me a pure heart.)

[Chorus]