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Christopher Macklin
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Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Secular Vocal Performance in Early Wales

CHRISTOPHER MACKLIN

In his book *Acoustic Communication*, Barry Truax proposed that auditory phenomena could be usefully described along a continuum stretching from the limited subset of highly structured and semantically specific gestures that constitute human speech to the amorphous and semantically ambiguous mélange of acoustic events that make up the listener’s situational ‘soundscape’. Between these two extremes lies music, which, according to Truax, ‘refine[s] the sounds of nature into a powerful form of human expression’, or, as Bruce Smith put it, ‘moves nonhuman sounds in the direction of speech, and speech in the direction of nonhuman sounds’. Although Truax’s framework was originally formulated to account for music’s ‘colonization’ of new acoustic space at both ends of the spectrum wrought through late twentieth-century (particularly electroacoustic) composition, it is equally relevant to what we might term the ‘rediscovery’ of old acoustic space through historical and musicological investigation. In recent years, scholars of music, drama, literature, theology and even law have drawn attention to the need to grapple with the ‘performing voice’ in historical texts, and Truax’s continuum is a reminder of the imperative to think beyond conventional disciplinary divisions in developing methodologies for the study of oral/aural...
performance. This issue is particularly acute for traditions where there is limited documentary evidence; in musicology, therefore, much of this innovative work has occurred in textually elusive domains such as the performance of secular music in the Middle Ages and in the study of traditional musics outside the classical canon.\footnote{See, for example, Performance Practice: Ethnomusicological Perspectives, ed. Gerard Be\’hague (Westport, CT, 1984); Reinhard Strohm, Music in Late Medieval Bruges (Oxford, 1985); John Stevens, Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama, 1050–1350 (Cambridge, 1986); and Leo Treitler, ‘History and Music’, New Literary History, 21 (1990), 299–319.}

However, the centrality of music in Truax’s scheme of auditory signification suggests unrealized potential for musicological studies to feed into new insights among the linguists and historians who study acoustic phenomena at the edges of the spectrum.

One area where this kind of disciplinary syncretism has been embraced to excellent effect is the study of the ‘Musical and Poetical Relicks’ of medieval and early-modern Welsh court bards.\footnote{This term comes from an early collection assembled by the harper and antiquary Edward Jones (1752–1824), published as Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards Preserved by Tradition, and Authentic Manuscripts, from Remote Antiquity; Never Before Published (London: printed for the author, 1784).} The consummate expression of this art lay in the ability to compose and deliver elaborate strict-metre lyrics in the vernacular, accompanied in performance by some sort of instrumental elaboration.\footnote{This elaboration was most often delivered on the harp or on the six-stringed bowed lyre known in Wales as the crwth, although a late reference printed in 1592 in Siôn Dafydd Rhys’s Institutiones indicates that in less accomplished performances the lyrics might be accompanied simply by the rhythmic pounding of a staff on the floor by a little-regarded class of performer known as the datgeiniad pen pastwn (stick-end reciter/declaimer). See Sally Harper, ‘Dafydd ap Gwilym, Poet and Musician’, 2007, Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym, University of Wales, Swansea, \(<http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net/essays/sally_harper/index_eng.php>,\) accessed 2 March 2009.} There is a gross disparity, however, between the surviving vernacular lyrics apparently intended for oral performances of this kind, which number in the thousands, and the handful of non-liturgical records that feature recognizable musical notation, all of which are contained in two codices and lack indications of performed verbal texts.\footnote{These manuscripts are the so-called ‘Robert ap Huw Manuscript’ and the ‘Iolo Morganwg Manuscript’ (London, British Library, Add. MSS 14905 and 14970 respectively). Many excellent articles exploring their provenance, use and contents have been published in the journal Welsh Music History. See, in particular, Welsh Music History, 3, Special Issue, ed. Sally Harper (1999), dedicated to the Robert ap Huw Manuscript, which contains an article by Paul Whittaker (pp. 252–70) on the tablature of the Iolo Morganwg Manuscript. See also note 21 below. For an introduction to medieval Welsh vernacular poetry and its manuscript sources, see Daniel Huws, Medieval Welsh Manuscripts (Cardiff, 2000).} How can this pattern of documentation be reconciled with accounts of contemporary performance? The present study seeks to illustrate how historical and ethnomusicological approaches informed by Truax’s auditory continuum can interact productively to shed light on modes of secular performance in early Wales. Juxtaposing the ambiguous allusions to musicality in medieval and early-modern Welsh records with their parallels in historically distant yet structurally similar performance cultures such as early Latin
song and the bardic performances of the Kigandan court permits a new historical voice to emerge that neither purely sings nor speaks, but instead moves freely between music and speech, and delivers poetic texts musically and musical texts poetically.

Polysemy in medieval Welsh vocal terminology

Ambiguity regarding vocal performance registers in Wales is inherent in its language. While English and most other modern Western European languages make a clear semantic distinction between the types of vocalizations used, for example, in ‘singing’ a solo recital of Lieder in a concert hall and ‘reciting’ a dramatic monologue in a play or poetry in a coffee house, Welsh words deriving from the Indo-European stem ‘*kan-, cân-’ (as in the Latin *cantor*) maintain connotations of both poetry and music. Thus, the Welsh verb *canu* can mean ‘to sing’, ‘to play (an instrument)’ or ‘to compose poetry’, which makes it difficult to interpret the authorial intent behind records – for example, the rubric prefacing the collection of elegies to sixth-century heroes known as the *Gododdin* reads: ‘Hwn yw Æ Godôdin. Aneirin ae can’ (‘This is the *Gododdin*. Aneirin sang (recited? composed?) it’). Ordinarily the way to resolve the ambiguity would be to find contextual clues that make the meaning of the derivatives of *cân*-apparent, but even this task is not easy, because the ambiguity between speech and song extends to many other words in the Welsh language. For example, in their compositions bards refer frequently to certain artistic individuals as *cerddawr* (or *cerddor*, *cerddwr*; generalized noun *cerddoriaeth*), and their works as *cerdd* (singular *cerdd*). Thus at various points in the panegyric of the *Gododdin*, the author declared ‘Hyueid hir etmygir tra vo kerdawr’ (‘Hyfaidd Hir (the Tall) will be praised as long as there is a *cerddor*’), ‘Blwydyn bu llewyn llawer kerdawr’ (‘For a year many a *cerddor* was merry’) and ‘Nyt edewis e lys les kerdoryon prydein’ (‘the good of *cerddorion* did not leave his court’). The Welsh *cerdd* originally meant simply ‘craft’, and was used accordingly; but the word’s connotation is indicated by the phrases *cerdd dant* and *cerdd dafod*, literally meaning ‘string craft’ and ‘tongue craft’, and more generally translated as ‘music’ and ‘poetry’. This is the dominant sense in the medieval period;

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8 Welsh shares this ambiguity with classical languages such as Latin and Greek, as discussed below.
9 John Thomas Koch, The *Gododdin* of Aneirin: Text and Context from Dark-Age North Britain (Cardiff, 1997), li. The *Gododdin* is contained in the mid-thirteenth century ‘Book of Aneirin’ (*Llyfr Aneirin*; Cardiff, Central Library, MS 2.81), and while many aspects of the work’s composition and preservation are mysterious, there is typographical and palaeographical evidence within Cardiff MS 2.81 indicating that the version that survives was an operation to rescue, from two if not more exemplars, treasured texts which had probably almost passed from oral currency and which were perhaps no longer entirely understood’. See Daniel Huws, Five Ancient Books of Wales, H. M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures (Cambridge, 1996), 12–13.
hence a series of triadic rules apparently intended to help bards memorize the fundamentals of their craft (and written down in a fourteenth-century grammar) begins:

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

Teir priferd tant ysyd, nyt amgen: kerd grwth, kerd Delyn, a cherd y got [god].

Teir priferd megin ysyd, nyt amgen: organ, a phibeu, a cherd gan Delyn.

Teir priferd tauawt ysyd: prydu, a dachanu, a chanu gan Delyn.

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, pipes and bagpipe music.

There are three main crafts of the tongue: making poetry, reciting, and singing with the harp.11

In this passage, the word cerdd and the various English words used to produce a coherent translation have been italicized to help illustrate how difficult it is for English to capture the classification scheme embodied in the Welsh word: one either uses the overly general ‘craft’ and ignores the artistic connotations of the Welsh, or translates cerdd as ‘music’ and ignores its obvious relevance to poetry and oratory. The problem is compounded in the derivatives of cerdd first used in the Gododdin and increasingly common in written bardic cerddoriaeth. As Patrick Ford notes, while the word cerdd has survived in modern Welsh primarily in the two expressions for poetry and music distinguished by their following adjectives (cerdd dant and cerdd dafod), in medieval Wales the generalized noun cerddoriaeth refers to both crafts equally, and thus modern readers of medieval Welsh cannot be sure if its use in medieval Welsh poetry refers to music or to poetry.12 Similar ambiguities complicate the interpretation of many other words used descriptively in bardic lyrics, such as cainc, adrodd, gorchan (or gochawn, gwarchon) and lleisio, suggesting that the linguistic categorizations (or lack thereof, from the perspective of modern English speakers) reflect a distinction in actual practice rather than being isolated examples of non-specific polysemy.13

13 The meaning of cainc gradually shifted from ‘stem’ or ‘branch’ (as in ‘one cainc of a family tree’) to ‘piece of song, tune, or poem’. Y Geiriadur Mawr: The Complete Welsh–English, English–Welsh Dictionary, ed. Harold Meurig Evans, W. O. Thomas and Stephen Joseph Williams (3rd edn, Llandysul, 1963), 69; Harper, ‘Instrumental Music’, 23–4. Adrodd, though possibly related to the Old Irish word raidid meaning ‘speaks, says, tells’, is used ten times in the Gododdin in ambiguous circumstances that some have linked to the culture of the halls of the Welsh nobility. See Ford, ‘Performance and Literacy’, xxxiii, note 12. Similarly, the GPC (Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru, ed. R. J. Thomas, Gareth A. Bevan and Patrick J. Donovan, 4 vols. (Cardiff, 1950–2002)) lists ‘to give voice’, ‘cause audible effect’ and ‘sound, ring, &c. (e.g. of a trumpet, harp, bell)’ as valid interpretations of the word lleisio; while gorchan may be related to the Old Irish fo-cain meaning ‘sings to’, though its use in the Gododdin is similarly ambiguous; see Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, The Gododdin: The Oldest Scottish Poem (Edinburgh, 1969), 151; Canu Aneirin, ed. Williams, 50, 52, 44 (lines 1257,
The music of the bards

By the middle of the fourteenth century, native Welsh performers were composing lyrics in a new metre called the *cywydd deuair hirion* (more often referred to simply as the *cywydd*; plural *cywyddau*), ornamented through a system of virtuosic internal assonance and alliteration termed *cynghanedd*. *Cynghanedd’s* literal English translation is ‘harmony’, and the undisputed luminary of this new wave of aural *cerddoriaeth* was Dafydd ap Gwilym. Approximately 170 compositions have been attributed to him, and while many consider him the greatest artistic genius Wales has ever produced, his legacy is largely viewed in the context of Welsh literary history. A close reading of the *cywyddau* of the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, however, strongly suggests that for Dafydd and his contemporaries and followers, music and poetry were inextricably linked.

There is a great deal of support for this assertion, and research by Sally Harper and scholars associated with the Centre for Advanced Welsh Musical Studies at the University of Wales, Bangor, has done much in recent years to enhance our understanding of the relationship between music and poetry in early Wales. Harper calls particular attention to a passage in a sixteenth-century *cywydd* commemorating the *crwth* player Robert Rheinallt, in which the bard declared: ‘Mên and trebl a wnaeth Robert, / Tiwniau pur o’r tannau pert. / Naws rhwydd, er dim nis roddai / Ar sydd, os cywydd nis ca’i (‘Mean and treble Robert played, / Pure tones from the pretty strings. / An easy sensation, although he would give none of it / unless he had a *cywydd*’). Robert Rheinallt’s instrumental performance thus greatly (perhaps entirely) depended on the oral poetry he heard – implying a paradigm of musicality

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1322, 1104). Many modern translators attempt to evade these problems in situations where vocal connotations are prominent, either by translating the terms as ‘lay’ or ‘lai’, which is similarly broad but has perhaps unwanted connotations of Chaucer and medieval French song, or by tentatively noting that the word is a synonym of *canu*, for which the difficulties have already been discussed (see, for example, *Canu Aneirin*, ed. Williams, 322).

14 The *cywydd* metre is characterized by the use of seven syllables per line, and is structured in end-rhyming couplets in which the final syllable is alternately stressed and unstressed, as in the English pairing of lovers–hers, and men–happen. See Joseph P. Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Lyrics* (London, 1965), 15.


16 The most up-to-date collection of Dafydd ap Gwilym’s work is the bilingual critical edition of the poet’s works published online by Professor Dafydd Johnston and the Welsh Department at Swansea University in 2007 at <http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net>.


18 See, in particular, Harper, ‘Dafydd ap Gwilym’.

entirely distinct from the ‘pure’ instrumental music of modern times. Conversely, a cywydd from the late fourteenth-century bard Gruffudd Fychan ap Gruffudd ab Ednyfed implies that poetry cannot exist without music:

Prelad cyfarf braenarfaes  
Tew, byr, llwyd mewn tabar llaes,  
Beth, lle bai, a dalai dalm  
Yn absen llyfr wynebsalm?  
Saer heb ddur fwyall ni saif,  
O dda orchwyl ni ddyrchaisf.  
Eurych heb ddodrefn eraill,  
Ni wyr, ymwared ni aill.  
Gof o bwyth dof, beth a dâl  
Heb ei cinion, hoyw benial?  
Cael cyfflybrwydd a wyddwn,  
Cof rhwydd am y cyfrw hwn.  
Beth, ddifyr felenbleth ddyn,  
A dalai wawd heb delyn?  
Ba ddlew gellir, wir warant,  
Garu’n deg onid gan dant?  
Cenaïs, pan ragyldiais glod,  
Cywydd sengl, cuddiais anglod.

A cleric, armed and ready to sow,  
Short and fat, in trailing robe,  
What’s the point, wherever he roams  
Without the help of a book of psalms?  
A builder can’t craft without an axe,  
Will produce no worthy works;  
A goldsmith, with no precious metal,  
Is all at a loss, can’t produce at all;  
A smith, however mighty his arm,  
Without an anvil, couldn’t fit a helm.  
And another thing we are pleased  
To compare with such as these:  
What, o yellow-plaited beauty,  
Is a song without a harp to accompany?  
Truly, how can one even think to sing  
Without the weaving of her lovely strings?  
I sang a cywydd – a solo piece,  
But instead of praise, I earned disgrace.  

Gruffudd’s depiction of other medieval professionals, and the items most strongly associated with them, implies that the harp was most readily associated with the professional bard (to the extent that, like the smith with his anvil and the cleric with his breviary, it is impossible to act as a bard without one). The hint of comic hyperbole in this account leaves room for scepticism, yet the importance of the passage arises less from its ability to depict a historical event impartially than from what it reveals about the relationship between text and sound in the shared cultural framework of the medieval Welsh bard and his intended audience. Passages such as these indicate that the verbal artistry of the Welsh bards was intimately connected to ideas of musical performance, and that to understand their work we may need to reconsider our understanding of the relationship between poetry and music in aural experience.

What did such performances sound like? The frustrating dearth of musical sources means that any attempt to answer this question necessarily revolves around interpretation of the so-called ‘Robert ap Huw Manuscript’ of the early seventeenth century (see above, note 7), and, as will become apparent, this document raises far more questions than it answers. The pages of the Robert ap

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Huw Manuscript have been subjected to intense scholarly scrutiny for over a century. One notable feature of this manuscript, which it shares with many of the most important documents pertaining to non-liturgical Welsh musical culture, is its listing of ‘the 24 measures of cerdd dant’ (‘y pedwar mesur arhigain kerdd dant’). These measures form the basic structural units of the music: they do not correspond with the more familiar definition of a measure as equivalent to a ‘bar’, but rather to a set of chords whose defining characteristic is the order in which they appear; in this sense they are structurally akin to the note rows of serial composition. The harmonic structure revolves around the ordering of two types of chords, known as the cyweirdant (loosely, ‘keystring’) and the tyniad (‘turning’) respectively, and each measure can thus be represented in a binary code of 1s and 0s (or in some sources, ks and ts). So, for example, the measure corffiniwr is written 11001011 11001011, where 1 represents the cyweirdant and 0 the tyniad. The litany of the full 24 ‘measures’ actually occurs twice in the Robert ap Huw Manuscript – once in list form (p. 107), and once sequentially, heading a series of small pieces apparently intended as exercises (pp. 23–34) referred to collectively as the clymau cytgerdd (literally, ‘knots of harmony’), which according to the eighteenth-century antiquary and former owner of the manuscript Lewis Morris were copied by ap Huw from a book by Wiliam Penllyn. In each of the clymau cytgerdd, the chords in the bass part of the tablature follow the structure of the measure precisely; that is, there are only two chords in the bass, which occur in the order specified by the measure. Scholarly opinion has therefore coalesced around the idea that the music’s pulse is organized such that each ‘digit’


22 Including Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MSS 60, 62, 77, 155, and MS 17116B (Gwysaney 28), fol. 68’.

23 Crossley-Holland, ‘Secular Homophonic Music in Wales’, 142. The translations of these terms are very approximate, and some scholars have suggested that the most useful way to read them is as indications of ‘release’ and ‘tension’ respectively. Greater detail can be found in the glossary of Welsh Music History, 3 (1999), Special Issue, ed. Harper, 299–307; and in Paul Whittaker’s recent discussion of harmonic forms in the Robert ap Huw Manuscript, ‘Harmonic Forms in the Robert ap Huw Manuscript’, Welsh Music History, 7 (2007), 1–34.

24 The Robert ap Huw Manuscript had come into Morris’s possession at some time before 1742, and at the bottom of p. 22 a note in his hand ascribes the 24 clymau cytgerdd to a (now lost) book by Penllyn. However, to date no additional evidence has been found to support or refute this claim. For more information on the clymau cytgerdd, see Harper, ‘Dafydd ap Gwilym’, 10, 61–2.
in the measure, each cyweirdant or tyniad, is given an equivalent amount of time,\textsuperscript{25} and a number of musicians have realized these concepts in sound.\textsuperscript{26}

The resulting music is hypnotic and strangely beautiful, and it is tempting to speculate that this recreation is indeed similar to what Gerald of Wales heard in the twelfth century, which inspired him to quote himself loosely and write in his \textit{Description of Wales}:

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. To save time I repeat what I have written about the three [Celtic] peoples under the heading of ‘Musical Instruments’ in my \textit{Topography of Ireland} [III, ii]: ‘It is remarkable how [they] maintain a musical balance while moving their fingers so rapidly. They play their various instruments with consummate artistry, keeping them in close harmony. The resulting melody is complete and satisfying, played softly but at great speed, with what one can only call a smooth unevenness or a discordant concord. Whether they are playing in fourths or fifths, they always begin with B-flat and then come back to it at the end, so that the whole melody is rounded off sweetly and merrily. They begin a movement with much subtlety and end it in the same way. They play the grace notes with great abandon, above the heavier bourdon of the bass strings, and so produce a gay and lilting melody. The essence of all art is to conceal art: “When hidden, art delights; when obvious, it offends.”’\textsuperscript{27}

It might also be said that when performed independently, without a vocal text, these pieces often sound repetitive and alienating to the ears of modern listeners.\textsuperscript{28} Yet, as we have already seen, the roots of the instrumental art of the Welsh bards lie in a larger lyrical and fundamentally oral performance tradition, and an investigation of the kinds of musical skills deemed essential to all aspects of the performance might


\textsuperscript{27} Gerald of Wales, \textit{The Journey through Wales; and The Description of Wales}, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1978), 239; \textit{eadem}, \textit{The History and Topography of Ireland}, trans. John J. O’Meara (Harmondsworth, 1982), 103–4.

\textsuperscript{28} Several of the tracks on William Taylor’s CD \textit{Two Worlds of the Welsh Harp} (for example, the recordings of the \textit{Kaniad bach ar y gogower, Kaniad San Silin} and \textit{Kaniad ystafell}) exceed ten minutes in length, with musical development (as it is conventionally understood in Western classical music) drawn out over such prolonged periods as to render it nearly unrecognizable as such.
provide a context for understanding and appreciating the subtle styling of the Robert ap Huw repertory.

A rich source of information for this is the so-called ‘Statute of Gruffudd ap Cynan’, a bardic tract that (despite the association through its name with the eleventh-century Welsh king of Irish descent) was apparently compiled for the 1523 eisteddfod in Caerwys and revised in 1567 for a similar gathering. The Statute outlines the qualifications required for advancement through the bardic hierarchy, listing the requirements up to the level of pencerdd (master bard) for both poets and musicians, who were examined in broadly comparable ways. The document also lists seven musical forms – the cwllwm ymryson, colofn, cadair, caniad, gosteg, cwllwm cytgerdd, and tri mwehl odidog – which harp and crwth players were expected to master, and, most interestingly, outlines the skills and duties of the atgeiniad or datgeiniad, a class of performers who declaimed the works of other poets and who were expected in addition to possess musical expertise.

One early version of the Statute in British Library, Add. MS 19711 (apparently copied by William Llŷn in the mid- to late sixteenth century), specifies two levels of datgeiniad. To earn his initial fee, the datgeiniad was expected to ‘serve the poet diligently, and follow him, and dress and undress him, and carry him water and a towel and all such service’, and ‘know how to read Welsh and know its eight parts of speech, its syllables, and how to compose an englyn [another class of Welsh strict-metre poetry] in the manner of a household bard to amuse young women and gentlewomen’. More importantly, he had to be able to classify and declaim three types of poetry (englyn, cywydd and awdl) and advise the poet of any mistakes in his work. In addition, the datgeiniad could increase his fee ‘by authority of the art of music’, by ‘learning all its “plethiadau” [six manual techniques for striking strings], a common profiadau and [the] gostegion [plural of gosteg, for which see above], and the 13 prifgeinciau [main tunes], and know[ing] them well in their parts and declaim[ing] his cywydd with them’.

A later edition of the Statute in National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 158B, further indicates that the datgeiniad has taken a more elevated place within the bardic hierarchy and might now qualify (like instrumentalists and poets) as a ‘temporary apprentice’ (disgybl ysbâs) or an ‘instructable’ apprentice (disgybl disgyblaidd). Examples of three of the musical genera listed in the Statute of Gruffudd ap Cynan (namely, the gosteg, caniad and cwllwm cytgerdd) are notated in the Robert ap Huw Manuscript; but unfortunately

the same cannot be said about any of the prifgeinciau,\textsuperscript{34} and in any case the word used in the Statute commonly translated as ‘declaim’ is atkan or datganu,\textsuperscript{35} which with its troublesome root, ‘canu’ (see above), still leaves one struggling for a framework to characterize the sound of these oral performances.\textsuperscript{36} Without additional sources connecting individual pieces in the Ap Huw Manuscript directly with individual poems, scholars in recent years have sought to fill in the gaps by examining music linked to the Welsh bardic repertory either chronologically (in the case of, for example, troubadour song) or culturally (in the case of the vocal delivery of Protestant Welsh preaching).\textsuperscript{37} However, such efforts are in their infancy, and it is instructive to place these suppositions in a wider ethnographic context.

### Ethnographic analogues of medieval Welsh bardic performance

While the overall cultural milieu that sustained Welsh bardic performance is historically unique, it is possible (and indeed probable) that the individual musical, verbal and social elements that created such performance through their interaction have occurred at other times across history. The analysis of such parallels can be productive, though it is important to stress, as Karl Reichl does, that carrying it out is not necessarily to imply any direct ‘genetic’ relationships between the forms. Rather, the ‘areas are set side by side in the same way linguistic typology groups genetically unrelated but structurally similar languages’, and should be understood accordingly.\textsuperscript{38}

Caveats aside, much might be gleaned from the fact that parallels to the semantic ambiguity in Welsh derivatives of cerdd\textsuperscript{-} and cân\textsuperscript{-} are found in classical Latin, where the word carmen can mean ‘saying’, ‘judgment’, ‘motto’, ‘poem’ or ‘song’,\textsuperscript{39} and many of whose writers seem to conflate speech and song. Thus Horace (\textit{Odes IV},

\textsuperscript{34} Although Peter Greenhill has suggested that some or all of them might actually be in the set of clynau cygerdd beginning on p. 22 of the Robert ap Huw Manuscript. Greenhill, cited in Harper, ‘Dafydd ap Gwilym’, 49.
\textsuperscript{36} The Robert Evans and Mary-Anne Roberts duo Bragod has experimented with sung recitation of verse to the accompaniment of the crwth, and while the historicism of their vocal performance is informed by little more than a familiarity with Celtic folksong and the caricature provided by the Englishman Andrew Borde in his \textit{First Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge} (1547; repr. London, 1870), likening a Welshman’s voice to the ‘hussyng of a homble be’ (p. 126), the results are tantalizing. See p. 24 of the notes accompanying the Bragod CD \textit{Kaingk}.
xii.10) talks of Arcadian shepherds ‘speaking a song’, Ovid claims that his elegiacs were ‘sung all over Rome’ (totam cantata per urbem), instruments are said to ‘sing’ (tibicinam cantantem), and Boethius appears to use the words for ‘poet’ (poeta, poetria, vates) and ‘singer’ (cantor, acroama) interchangeably in his writings.

Similarly, Gregory Nagy has noted that

the internal evidence of Homeric and Hesiodic diction tells us that the word aeido ‘sing’ (as in Iliad I 1) is a functional synonym, in contexts where the medium refers to its own performance, of the word enepo ‘narrate, recite’ (as in Odyssey I 1), which does not explicitly designate singing, and... the aoide ‘song’ of the Muses (at Hesiod Theogony 104) is in the context of the poet’s bidding them to ‘narrate’ (espete: Th. 114) and to ‘say’ (eipate: Th. 115).

Corroborating evidence can be found in the fact that the ancient Greek word nomoi means both ‘songs’ and ‘laws’, and in Quintilian’s account of how ‘Gaius Gracchus, the leading orator of his age [...] had a musician standing behind him with a pitch pipe, or a tonarion as the Greeks call it, whose duty it was to give him the tones in which his voice was to be pitched’ during all public speeches. Quintilian also cautions against ‘degeneration into sing-song or the effeminate modulation’ by quoting a saying attributed to a young Gaius Caesar: ‘If you are singing, you sing badly; if you are reading, you sing.’ Working from this evidence, scholars have suggested that ‘singing and speaking were not so widely separated from each other in Greek or early Roman Latin as in the modern languages with which we are most familiar, and it is possible that this concept of vocal performance influenced much of early Europe and Asia (as indeed the Greek ideal of rhetoric did) through the military and cultural conquests of their Roman successors and imitators. Certainly a corresponding ambiguity is found in

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42 Beare, The Roman Stage, 229.
45 Potter, Vocal Authority, 11.
47 Ibid., i.viii.2, 147.
48 Beare, The Roman Stage, 223.
Anglo-Saxon epic, as can be easily (if crudely) demonstrated by comparing the wording used in different English translations of the verses which refer to vocal performance.49

While all of the examples of linguistic ambiguity between musical song and other performance acts hitherto discussed have emerged from ‘dead’ languages in the remote past, it should not be assumed that this phenomenon is a purely historical one with no parallels in the modern world. In parts of Latvia it is traditional ‘in structured social occasions, especially christenings and weddings, [...] to have on hand one or several women who [are] esteemed as teicejas, “singers/reciters”, 50 while in much of Africa musical performance ‘hardly exists as a separate art from dance, and in many African languages there is no separate word for it, although there are rich vocabularies for forms, styles, and techniques’.51 More importantly, in many African traditions the music is inseparable from language (as well as dance) in performance, and an understanding of the sonic elements of the language is essential for an understanding of the music. For example, in Uganda ‘the primary form of Kiganda music is the song; even when an instrumentalist is playing alone, he will say he is “playing a song” (singular oluyimba, plural ennyimba)’,52 and ‘in traditional singing, the tonal and rhythmic structure of the language is [...] very closely preserved when word patterns are sung’.53 A similar situation exists among the Mandinka of West Africa, for whom the words used to describe instrumental performance are entirely vocal in nature; thus performers say that their instrumental accompaniment ‘must have balafia (sentiment), just as does the vocal technique [...] the same concept is sometimes called nijio (breath)’.54 This emphasis on the verbal qualities of music helps explain the otherwise puzzling fact that although professional musicians of the Mandinka must possess formidable skill on multiple instruments,55 when asked to name the most important qualities of their profession most

49 As in, for example, the editions of Beowulf published in quick succession by Seamus Heaney (New York) and Roy M. Liuzza (Peterborough, ON) in 2000. One illustrative case in point occurs in lines 1159–60, where Heaney translates ‘Léoð was āsungen / gleō-mannes gyd’ as ‘The poem was over / the poet had performed’ (p. 83) while Liuzza opts for ‘The lay was sung, / the entertainer’s song’ (p. 89). Such ambiguities also abound in other monuments of Anglo-Saxon literature, such as Widsith and Deor. For a nuanced and informative introduction to the issue, see Jeff Opland, Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry: A Study of the Traditions (New Haven, CT, 1980), esp. pp. 29–30 and 230–56.
55 In particular, the balo, a 19-key xylophone, and the kora, a 21-stringed harp-lute.
performers cite, ‘1) courage, 2) the ability to talk (meaning a command of words) and a knowledge of proper words, and 3) a good voice’.\(^\text{56}\) Music is conceptualized as a vocal act.

Given the apparently close relations between speech, song and even instrumental music in these communities with strong oral and ‘bardic’ traditions, it is scarcely surprising that the contour of the music bears striking similarities to the contour of the language of the speech community. The most detailed research on this topic has been done by Catherine Gray with Kigandan singers,\(^\text{57}\) and she noted how within a given piece all the pitches used by a given singer (with the exception of a few brief passages sung in falsetto ‘to draw attention to certain words in the text which [the singer] thinks are important’) fall within a hexachord.\(^\text{58}\) The mirroring of Kigandan speech extends to the rhythm of the sung words as well. The basic unit of time in this music is the \textit{mora}, which is defined as the duration of a short syllable in verse. The instrumental ostinato which accompanies the voice repeats in groups of six \textit{morae}, and by convention and tradition each \textit{mora} is assigned an exact rhythmic value within the pulse. In spoken Lugandan [the language of the Kigandan people] a long syllable has two \textit{morae} and a short syllable one; thus every long syllable, or every short, has a standard metrical value when sung.\(^\text{59}\) The resulting music, while always conforming to these strict rules, sounds quite ‘free’ and unmetrical in performance—in many ways a realization in sound of the ‘blurred boundary’ between speech and song witnessed in the language.

More importantly, these speech-like characteristics are not simply isolated quirks of one community’s folk music; rather, they appear to be a hallmark of those traditions most firmly rooted in the preservation of oral culture. An ambitus of approximately a hexachord is found in many of the melodies of, for example, the Mingrelian people of western Georgia, as well as those of the Tolyasar in eastern India and of Alwar regions of northern Rajasthan.\(^\text{60}\) In the area of the former Yugoslavia so beloved by Milman Parry and Albert Lord, folksong melodies range as widely as a fourteenth, though an analysis of the collection of 3,215 of these tunes collected and described by Béla Bartók reveals that 91\% fall within the more restricted range of an augmented hexachord (a minor seventh).\(^\text{61}\) These south Slavic

\(^{56}\) Knight, ‘Music in Africa’, 73.


\(^{58}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 138.

\(^{59}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 129.


data are particularly suggestive, since a preliminary analysis of 17 minutes and 4 seconds of the interviews with Slavic bards recorded by Parry and Lord in July and November 1934 indicated that the average range of pitches used in a single conversation fell within a major sixth or a hexachord (7.11 semitones, n = 9 speakers) – very nearly the same range as the song. It is also worth noting that this restricted range of an augmented hexachord is precisely the range of pitches utilized by Havik chanters of the Samaveda, one of three sacred Hindu compositions with an unbroken tradition of performance whose antiquity is greater than that of any other known work. Because of its centrality to the Hindu religion, the Samaveda was written down around the sixth century BC, and while its written form does contain indications of pitch inflection, it appears to have no indications of note duration. However, a more detailed analysis of Sanskrit literature has revealed that the temporal information needed to perform this music is implicit in the text itself, and interestingly the solution used in the Samaveda performance tradition is identical to that used by the Kigandan court singers of modern times. According to a treatise of 56 sutras known as the Matralaksana or Chandogaparisista, ‘the temporal unit is the matra, which is equivalent to the length of a short (brasu) syllable (that is a syllable whose vowel is short)’. Long (dirgha) syllables are two matras long, while ‘augmented’ (vrdha) and non-nasal syllables each contain three matras. Thus, simply by viewing the text, the Brahman priest singing the Samavedic chant knows precisely how long each syllable, and each note, should last.

Is there any reason to think that similar conditions prevailed within the Celtic vocal cultures of northern Europe? In her 1986 study of Welsh folksong, Phyllis Kinney observed that ‘one of the most striking aspects of Welsh traditional music is the large number of melodies which lie within a narrow compass of between three and seven notes’. Of the 852 traditional Welsh folksongs in print, Kinney observed that 189 (or 22.18%) use a vocal ambitus within this range, with 60 of these tunes lying within a pentachord. This is in marked contrast to the folksongs of England, where only four out of 1,360 published melodies can be sung within a pentachord, and scarcely more even within the range of a seventh. Of the pentachordal Welsh tunes, the texts associated with 26 of these melodies are cast in poetic metres traditionally used by the bards, such as the triban, which suggests that these restricted-range tunes may have originated in the singing of the poetic compositions of their bardic predecessors. As might be expected, this style of ‘heightened speech’ vocal delivery appears to be relatively ancient, as evidence for similar performance

62 Analysis performed by the author ‘by ear’, that is, without the use of sound-analysis software (though with the benefit of absolute pitch).
64 Ibid., 38–40.
66 Ibid.
67 Though none, unfortunately, are in the form of the cywydd dewair birion; ibid., 13.
can be found in the Celtic traditions of Brittany and Ireland. This was highlighted rather dismissively by Reverend Thomas Price on his tour through Brittany in 1829, during which he observed that Breton folk airs ‘are all short, simple, and of very small compass; seldom having anything striking in their composition, or even beyond the most common arrangement of notes’ and transcribed one exemplar with the vocal compass of a pentachord. More indirect, but rather more revealing, is the fourth stanza of the ninth-century Irish poem ‘Creide’s Lament for Dínertach’, which can be read: ‘His speaking was more musical than songs (except for the holy adoration of the King of heaven).’ While we must be careful not to read an excessive amount into a single reference, it is striking that this comment seems to suggest that the speech of Dínertach flowed similarly to, yet was more exaggerated than, that used by bards in ‘songs’, without possessing the character of the monodic plainchant used by the Irish Church. Such a reading implies that the vocal style used in the ‘songs’ of Celtic bards, at least in Ireland at that time, was some form of ‘heightened speech/song hybrid’, and corresponds powerfully with the conclusions reached through other lines of evidence.

The similarities between the music of medieval Wales and the modern bardic traditions discussed above do not end here. Just as in Vedic chant and Kigandan folksong, the duration of pitches may be implicit in the texts themselves. After the conquest of Wales by Edward I, there was justifiable concern that Welsh culture was in jeopardy. As a result, scriptoria in fourteenth-century Wales started producing many more manuscripts in the Welsh language that covered a wide variety of culturally significant subjects, including prose, poetry, historical texts, medicine, science and grammar. Of these manuscripts, the Red Book of Hergest (Oxford, Jesus College, MS 111) enjoys pride of place, both in terms of its outstanding workmanship and its comprehensiveness. The intent of the primary scribe, Hywel Fychan, ‘appears to have been to gather into one book the classics of Welsh literature’, and the book is often described as a ‘one-volume library’. Included in this manuscript is a bardic ‘grammar’ attributed to Einion Offeiriad, which lists the elements of the bardic craft and provides a detailed analysis of the many aspects of the medieval Welsh language that had to be mastered for proper composition and performance of cerdd dafod. Buried in this mass of linguistic minutiae we find the following statement:

71 Huws, Medieval Welsh Manuscripts, 86.
72 Ibid., 82.
Rhai o’r sillafau a fyddant hirion, eraill a fyddant fyron. *Dau amser sydd i sillaf bir, ac un amser i sillaf ferr;* canys hwy o amser y byddir yn dywedyd sillaf bir, nog yn dywedyd sillaf ferr. Pan fo ‘n’ yn ol ‘r’, fal y mae ‘barn’, neu ‘s’ yn ol ‘r’ fal y mae ‘cors’, ‘gwers’, neu Llythyren fud yn ol ‘r’, fel y mae ‘cwrt’, ‘swrth’, honno a elwir Tromleddf, a hir fydd a dau amser a fydd iddi. Pob sillaf talgronn berr fydd, ac un amser a fydd iddi; na dipton dalgronn fo na sillaf arall dalgronn, cyd boed hwy dipton dalgronn, na sillaf arall dalgronn. Ac felti rhai o’r sillafau lleddfon a fyddant hwy nog eraill, herwydd mesur o lythyr, ac amseroedd a fo ynddynt.

Some of the syllables are long, and some are short. *A long syllable has two times, and a short syllable one time;* because it takes a longer time to pronounce a long syllable, than it would to pronounce a short syllable. When n follows r, as in barn, or s follows r, as in cors, gwers; or when a mute follows r, as in cwrt, swrth, it is called a ‘drumming oblique’ *[Tromleddf]*, and is long, and has two times. Every ‘round’ *[talgronn]* syllable is short, and has but one time, whether it be a round diphthong, or any other round syllable, so that it be a round diphthong or any other round syllable. In like manner some of the ‘oblique’ *[lleddfon]* syllables are longer than others in respect of the measure of letters and times which belong to them.

This statement sounds remarkably like the sections of the Sanskrit *Matralaksana* that described the rhythms to be used in chanting the Samaveda, and as we have already seen it exactly mirrors the metrical principles that characterize Kigandan folksong. Since the author defines ‘mute’, ‘round’ and ‘oblique’ syllables elsewhere in the text, it is possible for a researcher familiar with linguistic techniques and the Welsh language to apply these rules to the *cywyddau* of the bards and acquire a rhythm for the performance of the vocal component of the work.

**Conclusion**

In light of the evidence presented above, we might propose that medieval vocal performance of Welsh lyrics such as the *cywydd* was defined rhythmically by the rules of syllabic pronunciation found in the bardic grammars, and tonally by the melodic contours of the Welsh language. Thus, the essential ‘musical’ information for the vocal performance was transmitted by the rules governing the pronunciation of the texts themselves and the shared prosody of the speech community. Such an interpretation offers an explanation of why no surviving records of bardic

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73 Adapted from John ab Ithel Williams, *Dosparth Edeyrn Davod Aur, or the Ancient Welsh Grammar* (Llandovery, 1861), 37–8. Although old-fashioned and rather overly precise in the grammatical terms assigned to Welsh concepts that unsurprisingly defy easy classification (for example, translating *tromleddf* as ‘gravisparsison’, *talgronn* as ‘rotundison’ and *lleddfon* as ‘sparsison’), Williams’s edition remains the only published version of this text that presents Welsh- and English-language versions side-by-side for easy comparison.

performance use recognizable musical notation to indicate the vocal part. Under these conditions, musical notation for the vocal line is largely redundant, and the notated examples such as those found in the Robert ap Huw Manuscript represent either a ‘crystallization’ of repeated instrumental extemporization used to accompany the poetry, or solo pieces that because of their non-conformity with this framework required the adoption of new forms of notation to capture their essential characteristics.

Moreover, through the exploration of this repertory, modern historians and musicologists have an opportunity to meet the challenge posed by Richard Taruskin to rethink a genre ‘in its specific details, and on as close to its own aesthetic [...] terms as human nature and human epistemics allow, rather than from the acceptance of a standard of beauty or of audience appeal imported unreflectingly from past experience’. The Welsh bards of this model do not purely sing or speak as modern opera stars or actors do, but rather continuously move across Truax’s auditory continuum in a way that curiously parallels the diversity of our own listening experience in a semiotically blurred acoustic environment. Given the right approach, ‘hearing’ their music may be easier than we think.

ABSTRACT
There are many historical repertories of interest for which documentary evidence is scant. In such areas traditional models of musicological research, driven by notation, may be of limited use, and there is thus a need to develop alternative formulations for the relationship between the performance, the performer and the text. In this study, textual analysis and ethnographic comparisons of structurally similar performance cultures (namely, classical Greece and Rome and bardic traditions of south-eastern Europe and eastern Africa) are combined to examine one such tradition: the secular music of the bards of medieval and early-modern Wales. Contemporary accounts pertaining to this repertory are characterized by a systematic ambiguity in their description of speech and song, and a selective use of musical notation for instrumental but not vocal figuration. Comparisons with other musical cultures that share this ambiguity lead to the development of a model of performance that accounts for these textual features.