

Writing music for a bilingual Church: Cymun y Cymry/The Welsh Eucharist

John Harper

Cymun y Cymry/The Welsh Eucharist represents – so far as is known – the first considered attempt to compose music for use from the outset with prose texts in either of two languages; certainly this is the case in the bilingual Church in Wales. Music for worship has also to meet other requirements related to collective use and ownership, and technical constraints. This essay was first presented as a paper to the conference of the Centre for Advanced Welsh Music Studies held in Bangor in June 2007. It shows how music which is by intention and requirement neither stylistically original nor technically demanding has to address entirely new challenges of bilingual composition for church use – thereby raising questions about language, music and cultural identity.

Composing for the liturgy is not straightforward. There is a significant distinction between liturgical composition and free composition or arrangement. In liturgical music, a composer's prime responsibility is to the worshipping community, not to his or her own musical expression. The composer (or arranger) is an intermediary for those seeking to express worship through the medium of music. Furthermore, music is not just a means of expressing words. Those who write music have to recognise that, where people in church wish to sing, part of the task is to enable those people to find their song and their voice; for music which is shared (in this context by a worshipping community) reflects, builds and becomes part of their collective identity. This caveat is as applicable to those selecting music by others as to those who compose or arrange: does this music resonate with the group of people assembled; might it enable them to find their song and their voice?

The questions become more complex in bilingual Wales. How does a bilingual community reflect its nature and its identity in its music? How, furthermore, does it do this where the bilingualism is uneven? – where, for instance, some in church are monoglot English speakers, or lack sufficient Welsh to be able to deal with the niceties of theology or the versified sentence structures of the hymn writers? One solution is to have Welsh services for Welsh speakers and English services for everyone else. But the Church in Wales has never been wealthy, and – with more buildings than it needs – the clergy and lay ministers are increasingly stretched. Where in the past it was possible to offer separate services in both Welsh and English, a single bilingual service is becoming more common. That immediately raises issues of language and of cultural identity.

So far as language is concerned, the Church in Wales publishes its authorised Orders of Service with Welsh and English texts presented in parallel in the service books. That means that whichever language is chosen by the priest or minister, the text can be followed in the other language. Problems occur, however, whenever the text digresses from the authorised – that is to say during the prayers and during the sermon. Is everything to be said twice, in both languages; or is the language common to all (that is to say, English) to be used? The problem is more acute with texts that are said or sung together. The choice of hymns and songs in a bilingual worshipping community often operates on the basis of numerical fairness: an equal

number of Welsh and English texts. Many hymns with Welsh texts emanate from the Non-conformist tradition. That raises two further problems: first, both melody and words can be unfamiliar to English-speaking members of the community; second, there can be instances when the theology reflects Non-conformist thinking, and that can be unsettling in an Anglican context. But perhaps some of the most difficult moments for a monoglot English speaker come when a well-loved English hymn is sung in a Welsh translation: the sense of exclusion can be acute.

The potential frustration for both elements of a bilingual community in bilingual worship scarcely needs spelling out: Welsh speakers can feel that their own language is being ousted; English speakers can feel excluded whenever Welsh is used. These are serious issues in any community situation, but particularly significant in the context of a worshipping community gathered together. The issues are right at the heart of personal spiritual identity as well as at the heart of collective, cultural and spiritual identity and its expression.

One solution is to argue for modes of expression that are less dependent on words – where symbols and actions have a stronger part. But here I want to consider the challenge of shaping a new repertory of text and music which is from the outset bilingual. That then raises further questions about the ways in which music takes on specific musical characteristics because of the nature of the language being set (e.g. stress patterns, aural characteristics of vowel and consonant use, grammatical structures and syntax). That in turn leads to questions about music and cultural identity. And we are talking here about music to be sung by all present at a service, in a whole range of settings, with different sizes of congregation, different musical resources and different musical competencies.

The Eucharist 2004

In 2004 the Church in Wales published a new Order of the Eucharist in contemporary language, *Trefn ar gyfer y Cymun Bendigaid/An Order for the Holy Eucharist*. In this it followed on from the new Orders developed most recently by the Church of England and the Church of Ireland. However, the new Order in the Church in Wales differed from that of the other Churches because it was bilingual, and it was compiled in the knowledge that in some parts of Wales local churches would have to use the service bilingually.

A new Order invited new musical settings. More pertinently, a new Order offered the opportunity to ask what music can be shared together locally, regionally or nationally, regardless of whether we are Welsh- or English-speaking. Indeed, can there be a new bilingual music that expresses the culture and identity of a bilingual Church, a Church which is not divided by language, but strengthened through music?

The new texts were made available to me before publication early in 2004, and I began worked on an integrated bilingual in the Spring of that year. *The Welsh Eucharist/Cymun y Cymry* was piloted at an RSCM diocesan festival in St Asaph Cathedral in June 2004, and the final version was used for the first time at the gathering of the Church in Wales's governing body in September 2004 when the new Order was formally launched.

The intention was to produce a setting of those normative texts of the Eucharist said or sung by all present, and to produce music that could be sung in Welsh or in English or indeed in both languages simultaneously. Had the texts been versified and set in the same metres for

both Welsh and English that might have been relatively straightforward. But these were prose texts with their own word patterns, rhythms and stresses. Furthermore, in one movement – the Gloria in excelsis – the structural order of the text differed in the two languages.

Musical constraints

If the nature of the texts caused problems, there were further musical constraints and challenges. If this was to be music that could be used throughout the Church in Wales, it had to take account of the very different musical resources and technical competencies. It needed to be usable with piano or organ accompaniment or with guitar or harp, or suitable for arrangement locally for an undetermined instrumental ensemble. Furthermore it needed to be easy enough for those with limited keyboard facility, or adaptable to simple harmonic support through chord symbols. In some churches there might be no instrumental accompaniment, and the melody needed to be self-sufficient for unaccompanied unison singing; in others there might be a competent choral group keen to sing in harmony. Whether sung in unison or in harmony, the top melody part had predominantly to be set within the ambit of the fifth between E to B for congregational singing, with relatively occasional excursions higher or lower, and a maximum range of a ninth from C to D. (That of course has consequences for the tessitura of the middle parts, since the bottom of the bass range is fixed at G or possibly F.) Finally, the music had to be in an idiom that was accessible, but which would not pall when used week after week. It had to endeavour to be durable – in so far as one can ever write music that is by intention durable. It needed to be memorable, but not trite.

Challenges of reconciling bilingual texts

Setting text to music in a language that is not your own can be perilous. Trying to set prose texts in two languages might be regarded as foolhardy – and certainly the Archbishop of Canterbury thought it would be impossible. And it would have been impossible without the clear practical guidance from Welsh-speaking musicians: advice on word stress given at an early stage by Wyn Thomas, and comments on drafts offered by both Wyn Thomas and John Hywel.

The problems of stress and syllabic distributions can be observed in the opening phrase of the Kyrie:

Ar-glwydd tru-gar-ha
Lord have mer-cy

While there is an opening stress in both languages, the next stress in the Welsh comes on the fifth and final syllable; in the English it comes on the third and penultimate syllable.

In the Agnus Dei, the text patterns are yet more independent, and the Welsh includes three instances where there are adjacent stresses:

Oen Duw sy'n dwyn y - maith be-cho-dau'r byd: tru-gar-ha wr-thym.
Lamb of God you take a-way the sins of the world: have mer-cy on us.

And the final petition is very different in length in the two languages:

dy-ro in-ni dang-ne-fedd. (7)
grant us peace. (3)

However, the greatest difficulty is caused by the change in text order in the first part of Gloria in excelsis:

Go-go-niant yn y gor-uch-af i Dduw,
Glo-ry to God in the high - est,

ac ar y ddaear tang - nefedd, e-wyllys da i bawb.
and peace to his people on earth.

Moliannwn di, bendithiwn di,
Lord God, heavenly King,

add-olwn di, gogo- neddwn di,
Al - mighty God and Fa-ther,

di- olchwn i ti am dy fawr o - goniant.
we worship you, we give you thanks,

Arglwydd Dduw, Frenin nefol, Dduw Dad Holla-lluog.
we praise you for your glory.

Musical solutions

From here onwards, page references are to the published score of Cymun y Cymry/The Welsh Eucharist (RSCM Press, 2004). A demonstration recording is also available.

Looking at some of the musical solutions to these problems, I want to start with the second part of the Sanctus I, the Benedictus (pp. 22-23). In both languages the long relative clause is a problem:

Ben-di-ge-dig yw'r hwn sy'n dy-fod yn en-w'r Ar-glwydd.
Bless-ed is he who comes in the name of the Lord

Ho-san-na yn y gor-uch-af.
Ho-san-na in the high-est.

The solution at the beginning of the phrase was to repeat 'Blessed' in the English text (p. 23, bars 24-5). However, the sentence structure (in both languages) allowed for no break in the musical phrase, even though the consequent length of the phrase would inevitably tax untrained singers (bars 24-9).

When I showed the draft to Wyn Thomas he was concerned that the melismatic opening was unsuited to the Welsh aesthetic of church word-setting (which most often avoids melisma – a reflection of Calvinist influences). And John Hywel was uneasy about the setting of 'Hosanna yn yr goruchaf'. The solution with the melismatic opening (bars 24-5) was to re-use the simpler form of the minor third motif from the opening of the Sanctus (bars 5-6) – see *Example 1a* below. In the case of the Hosanna, reversing the pitch order for 'yn yr gor-' addressed the problem (bars 20 and 33) – see *Example 1b* below.

A challenge of writing music for congregation is to find the balance between accessibility and triteness. The music needs to be immediately accessible (to take account of occasional worshippers), and at the same time it has to avoid what will feel trite and quickly pall (for those who attend church regularly). This can be especially difficult in the repetitions of the short phrases of the Kyrie. In Kyrie I of *Cymun y Cymry/The Welsh Eucharist* (pp. 6-7), I used the accompaniment to offer time for reflection between the phrases, and adopted a pattern where the regularity of material operated at an augmented pace in the voice parts.

<i>bar</i>	1	5	9	13	17	23
<i>Voices</i>	-	A	-	A	-	B
<i>Accompaniment</i>	A	A	B	A1	A2	B1

I adopted a similar structural approach to the musical material in the setting of the metrical text of Gloria in excelsis II (pp.19-20). This consists of three eight-line stanzas with the metre 87878787 in both languages. The musical setting is in two ‘stanzas’, each of twelve lines, with the melodic material ordered A B B | C B A.

<i>Words</i>		<i>Musical material</i>	<i>bars</i>
Stanza 1	lines 1-4	A	5-12
	lines 5-8	B	13-20
Stanza 2	lines 1-4	B	21-28
	lines 5-8	C	31-38
Stanza 3	lines 1-4	B	39-46
	lines 5-8	A	47-54

Such a division is better suited to the content and expressive dynamics of the text; it also avoids the Gloria becoming yet another strophic hymn. However, even in dealing with two versions of the text in the same metre, the relative quantities of the word stresses varied in some phrases in the two languages, and compromises had to be made in the rhythmic articulation of the melody.

The Eucharist was used in a trial version at a choral festival in St Asaph Cathedral in June 2004. After that I was unhappy with Agnus Dei I, and set it anew. I was coming to recognise that the balance between harmony and melody was different from what I expected. At the first attempt, and with an eye on unison unaccompanied singing, I originally felt that the melody needed to have stronger character – see *Example 2* below. After that first performance, I felt that the harmonic framework was more important, supporting a far simpler melodic progression – see the score, pp. 28-9. All through the Eucharist setting I have exploited the shift from major to relative minor – or the reverse, something that is characteristic of Anglican service music of the late 16th and earlier 17th centuries, and adopted more recently in Bernard Rose’s setting of the responses for Matins and Evensong written in 1957. Here, in Agnus Dei I, that shift is most pronounced in the third petition (p. 29, bar 17).

For some time I thought there was no alternative with the prose version of Gloria in excelsis I (pp. 9-18) than to make two settings, since the problems of differing text order seemed insuperable. In the end the solution was to rely on the musical coherence of the accompaniment. This is best demonstrated by an examination of the score. This shows the

reconciliation of varied phrase lengths to a single musical phrase (e.g. p. 9, bars 5-11), and the dependence on the accompaniment to address those places where text order is different (i.e. pp. 11-13, bars 27-56).

One final example comes from the second setting of the texts included in the anthology. This second setting is written in a simpler, homophonic style. The alternative text of *Agnus Dei II* raises problems because the petitions are irregular. Each petition begins with the invocation 'Iesu/Jesus' but the phrase which follows varies considerably from between 2 and 6 syllables in length in the two languages:

<u>I</u> esu, <u>O</u> en <u>D</u> uw:	<u>t</u> rugar-ha <u>w</u> rthym.
<u>J</u> esus, <u>L</u> amb of <u>G</u> od:	have <u>m</u> ercy on <u>u</u> s.

<u>I</u> esu, sy'n <u>d</u> wyn ein pe- <u>ch</u> odau:	<u>t</u> rugar-ha <u>w</u> rthym.
<u>J</u> esus, <u>b</u> earer of our <u>s</u> ins:	have <u>m</u> ercy on <u>u</u> s.

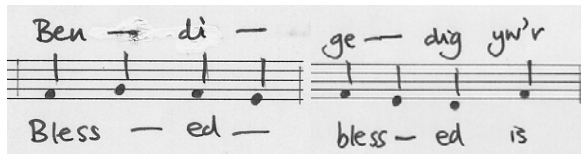
<u>I</u> esu, iach- <u>a</u> wdwr y <u>b</u> yd:	<u>d</u> y-ro <u>i</u> nni dy dang- <u>n</u> efedd.
<u>J</u> esus, re- <u>d</u> eemer of the <u>w</u> orld:	<u>g</u> ive us your <u>p</u> ea <u>c</u> e.

Apart from the issues of making music to work in both languages, this raises issues about how one can provide a repeated musical phrase that can accommodate this range of syllables without confusing a congregation.

The setting of *Cymun y Cymry/The Welsh Eucharist* was an experiment, to establish the viability of setting prose texts in two languages with the same music. In use in parish churches and at larger gatherings it has clearly met a need, especially in those dioceses where Welsh is used in worship. It has also been commended for use in English worship outside Wales, in Anne Harrison's review for *Praxis News of Worship* (2005). This is intended to be the beginning of a process. More work is being planned, with the support of the bishops of the Church in Wales, to develop a larger repertory of music that can be used in both Welsh and English. Beyond the practical challenge of identifying such a repertory, there are deeper cultural questions to consider in writing new music for such a bilingual repertory, and in analysing music that is written for bilingual use. There is no doubt that some of the musical outcomes of *Cymun y Cymry/The Welsh Eucharist* result from the assimilation of both constraints and opportunities afforded by the two languages. Anecdotal comments suggest that the use of two languages does affect the nature of a musical composition, and imbues it with a distinctive identity. Those who sing it and hear it have commented on the 'Welshness' of the music, even when it is sung in English. While a single Eucharist setting does not offer an adequate sample for analysis, it does suggest there may be a new musical and even cultural identity which is genuinely bilingual. Only when there is a larger repertory of bilingual music and developed criteria can such an assertion be tested with any reliability.

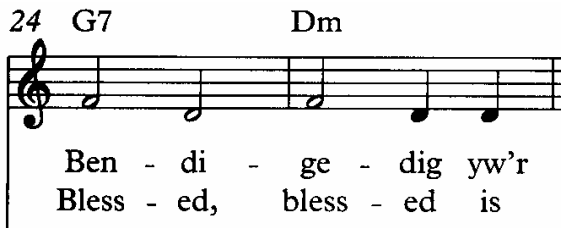
Example 1a

Sanctus I – opening of Benedictus
Comparison of original and revised versions



Handwritten musical notation for Example 1a. The top line shows the original version: "Ben - di - ge - dig yw'r" with notes on a staff. The bottom line shows the revised version: "Bless - ed - bless - ed is" with notes on a staff.

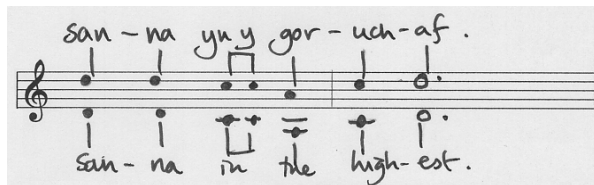
24 G7 Dm



Printed musical notation for Example 1a. The top line shows the original version: "Ben - di - ge - dig yw'r" with notes on a staff. The bottom line shows the revised version: "Bless - ed, bless - ed is" with notes on a staff.

Example 1b

Sanctus I – Hosanna
Comparison of original and revised versions



Handwritten musical notation for Example 1b. The top line shows the original version: "san - na yn y gor - uch - af ." with notes on a staff. The bottom line shows the revised version: "san - na in the high - est ." with notes on a staff.

33 Dm G7



Printed musical notation for Example 1b. The top line shows the original version: "san - na yn y gor - uch - af ." with notes on a staff. The bottom line shows the revised version: "san - na in the high - est ." with notes on a staff.

Example 2

Agnus Dei I: first version, abandoned, June 2004

Semplice (♩=63)
 Em Am/C Em Bm Em

5 *mp* G D Em Am
 Oen Duw, sy'n dwyn a
 Lamb of God, you take a

9 D Bm Em
 y - maith be - - cho - dau'r byd:
 way the sins of the world:

13 *p* Bm Em Am D
 1,2 tru - gar - ha, tru - gar - ha
 3 dy - - - ro in - ni dang - -
 1,2 have - - - mer - - - cy on - -
 3 grant us, grant us

17 G 1 & 2 3 Em Am/C
 1,2 wrth ym.
 3 ne - - fedd.
 1,2 us.
 3 peace.

21 Em Bm G