

Huw Stephens: 'There are no limits to where Welsh language music can go'

The broadcaster's new documentary surveys the last 50 years of Welsh language music and highlights its bright future

[Ammar Kalia](#) Last modified on Wed 7 Nov 2018 09.41 EST



Huw Stephens, with his anorak, in the Welsh countryside. Photograph: courtesy Huw Stephens

The Welsh language is beautiful, alive and spoken. It may not be used by everyone, but there are [well over 500,000 people who speak it in Wales](#). Our music, meanwhile, is an important way to remind people around the world that it exists.

I decided to make a road-trip around Wales to document this scene. Three years ago, director Gruff Davies and I set out, with no funding, to take a

snapshot of musicians on Wales's artistic fringes. Our documentary, *Anorac*, is a celebration of the language and of the work people have done to maintain its relevance. You have lifers, like John Peel favourites [Meic Stevens](#) and Datblygu, who have only ever sung in Welsh. *Anorac* is a testament to the fact that they're still here, and a tribute to the people making music now, such as Gwennno and the Bajan-Welsh singer Kizzy Crawford.

It's intriguing that there is a language in Britain that is spoken by so many but that most people won't understand. There used to be a snobbery about it. When [Super Furry Animals](#) released the album *Mwng*, in 2000 – which is still the best-selling Welsh-language album – puritans were angry that they had also released songs in English. But those days are well and truly over. There are stories of people who learned to speak Welsh because of *Mwng*, but you don't need to speak Welsh to enjoy these songs.

[Watch the trailer for Anorac on Vimeo](#)

I'm from a Welsh-speaking family. My parents would play records by people such as protest singer Dafydd Iwan and Bryn Fon, who are still popular across Wales. As I got older, I discovered alternative bands like Big Leaves and Welsh-language hip-hop. There was a group called Tystion who I'd hear on [John Peel](#)'s show and see play in Cardiff. They made me realise Welsh-language music could be whatever it wanted to be. It is important that we don't see Welsh-language music as a genre because it's not – just as French or Icelandic music isn't.

It's been 50 years since Y Blew released the first Welsh-language rock record, in the same year the Beatles released Sgt Pepper's. Since then, there have been periods of decline, but there is a tightknit scene in [Wales](#), so bands who

sing in Welsh and English gig and collaborate together. In the film, we show that the music has no boundaries; as long as it is wonderful, there are no limits to where Welsh-language music can go. There's no "us" and "them" when it comes to language. You don't have to sing in Welsh to be a Welsh band.

For as long as I remember, the Welsh-language music scene has been healthy. What you have in Wales is space for musicians to develop their craft without being in a bubble or having the financial pressures like London. And we're going through a golden period. There is [Gwenno](#), whose first album, *Y Dydd Olaf*, is sung entirely in Welsh and was critically acclaimed the world over. Bands such as [Joy Formidable](#), meanwhile, sing in Welsh and have just toured the US with the Foo Fighters. The public is becoming more aware of the music: if it's good, it will travel.



Super Furry Animals perform in 2016 at Festival No 6 in Portmeirion, Wales. Photograph: Richard Johnson

Making *Anorac* was a labour of love. The musicians trusted us to tell their story, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. People have realised the language is making a real cultural difference, despite English being so omnipresent. One of the central questions in the film is: "Wouldn't it

be easier if everybody sang in English?” The answer lies in the music, since all of these young artists want to sing in Welsh and they have an audience who want to listen to them.

I'll always love Welsh-language music, and I'm optimistic about its future. The creativity and the infrastructure to support that creativity is getting stronger all the time in Wales. There's a real appetite here to support our musicians in both English and Welsh, and it's an exciting period for young bands because it's a level playing field. We want this film to travel around the world because, although we're a small country, we're very proud of our music. We are the “Land of Song”, after all.

- Anorac is screening at the [Doc'n Roll festival at the Barbican, London](#), on 8 November.

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