

ATTENTION, ALL HARPISTS OF WALES!

Telynor Cymru 2016



John Roberts 'Telynor Cymru' (1806-1894)

A Message and Invitation from Clera The Society for the Traditional Instruments of Wales

In 2016, we shall be celebrating the **bicentenary of the birth of John Roberts, 'Telynor Cymru'** the famous Welsh Gypsy harpist,



and one of the most important figures in our folk tradition.

Through our initiative, **Telynor Cymru 2016**, Clera will be organizing a programme of workshops for harpists all over Wales during 2015 to teach the Welsh Gypsy style of harp playing..

The aim of this training project is to create enough 'Welsh Gypsy harpists' to give performances of Welsh Gypsy music during 2016.

Would you, or a friend who plays the harp join us?

John Roberts and 'The Family'

A great-grandson of Abram Wood himself ('Brenin y Sipsiwn' – 'The King of the Gypsies'), John Roberts was of mixed blood, half Welsh and half Romany, and he was extremely proud of both sides of his lineage. Like all Gypsies the world over, Abram Wood's family were all skilful musicians, and naturally here in Wales they became famous for playing the Welsh (or Triple) Harp. John Roberts 'Telynor Cymru' was the most famous of them all. (His bardic name 'Telynor Cymru' literally translates as 'The Harpist of Wales', but John himself more often favoured the more romantic interpretation 'Cambrian Minstrel'.)

'Telynor Cymru' was a famous 19th century harpist and impresario, promoting Welsh music and the Welsh (Triple) harp in particular; with his sons he formed the first official Welsh 'folk group', performing across Wales and around the English Border. He and his sons often competed with success in the Eisteddfodau of the time, and were often welcomed to the gentry's houses to give performances. Several family members, Woods and Robertses, played at Llanofor Court, the home of Lady Llanofor, 'Gwenynen Gwent', famous patron of the Welsh Harp and Welsh music. Once, John and his seven sons along with one of their cousins played on nine harps in front of Queen Victoria at Palé Hall near Bala, on a visit to Wales. John settled with his family in Newtown, Montgomeryshire in 1850, and on Sundays, they could be heard playing on the town's streets, or in the Bear Hotel. During the winter they would sometimes play on the banks of the river Severn for the townsfolk to go skating when the river had frozen. But during the summer months, their Romany blood would stir, and off they would go, with their harps on a cart behind them, wandering the countryside to perform, sleeping in tents or barns, fishing during the daytime, and playing at night.

On the musical side, Gypsy harpists were regular Welsh harpists, who practised their craft exactly in the same manner as their fellow Welsh countrymen. But one aspect of their music, very important to us in Welsh folk-harping, was that they had a particular style of interpreting and playing dance music, something rarely heard in the harp world in Wales today. In these dance melodies we hear the wild, fiery spirit which we normally associate with the Gypsies, the magical, compelling 'fire-works', or the 'Soul' as the Roberts family called it.

This technique was passed down through generations of the family in an unbroken oral tradition, eventually to Telynor Cymru's great-grand-daughter, Eldra Jarman (née Roberts). Eldra was always highly proud to point out that she was the sixth (if not seventh) generation of the Wood/Roberts family to play the harp. As many of you surely know, we are indeed very lucky that the melodies did not die with Eldra in 2001, as she very generously passed the tradition on to the hands (literally!) of Robin Huw Bowen, Wales's leading folk harpist and one of the founding members of Clera, who is renowned today for playing them.



*Well, harpists... ? Are you interested?
Would you like to be part of this project,
and learn the old Welsh Gypsy harp style? Then read on!*

Teaching workshops and the music



Clera is organizing a programme of workshops, to teach the tunes and the way of interpreting them on the harp. The workshops will take place all over Wales throughout the rest of 2015, under the direction of Robin Huw Bowen and several other tutors. If you would like to be a part of this, or if you know of any harpists who might be interested, then contact us with your details and we will forward the relevant information to you.

Instruction in the workshops will be oral, the old Gypsy style of teaching: showing, listening, watching, and then copying,. Participants will be able to record the sessions for their own use as a learning aid, but we are also preparing a website for the programme as a resource base for the teaching, with video clips of the tunes being played and slowly-fingered breakdowns of the patterns and fingering. There will also be mp3 files, and downloadable notation as well as a calendar of the activities.

We have prepared a summary of our expectations of those who join the project in terms of experience and the harp that is used. Because of the traditional nature of the music and because of the project time-scale, anyone wishing to take part will need to comply with the conditions/requirements listed below.

The workshops are not suitable for beginners or players of an elementary level.

For up-to-date information, go to:

**www.clera.org
www.telynor.cymru
www.sesiwn.com**

Further reading about the Welsh Gypsies:

Jarman, A.O.H. & Eldra: *Y Sipsiwn Cymreig*, Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1979
Jarman, A.O.H. & Eldra: *The Welsh Gypsies, The Children of Abram Wood*, UWP, 1991
Roberts, E. Ernest: *John Roberts, Telynor Cymru*, Gwasg Gee, Dinbych, 1978
Roberts, E. Ernest: *With Harp, Fiddle and Folk-tale*, E. Roberts, Newtown, 1981
Sampson, John: *The Dialect of the Gypsies of Wales*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1926
Yates, Dora: *My Gypsy Days*, Phoenix House, London, 1953

<http://www.valleystream.co.uk>
<http://wbo.llgc.org.uk/cy/c-WOOD-SIP-1500.html>
<http://yba.llgc.org.uk/cy/c-ROBE-JOH-1816.html>
<http://www.gypsyjib.com/page/Wood+family+Wales>



Conditions/Requirements:

- Each participant must have his/her own harp to use during the project, and that should be one of the following:
 - Welsh Triple harp
 - Celtic/Lever harp
 - Old Pedal harp (e.g.: Erard Grecian/Gothic, or similar)
 - Small Pedal harp (e.g.: Salvi Daphne 40 – but *not* Daphne 47/47S, etc.)
- As regards either size, sound, or image, the following harps will not be suitable:
 - Large modern orchestral/concert Pedal harp
 - Small electronic harp (strapped to the body)
 - Bray harp
 - Wire-strung harp
 - Latin American harps
- All harps used must have a range of at least **C₁ – G²** (about 3 and a half octaves)
- All harps must be tuneable to **C-major (A-440)**, and must be convincingly playable in that key (i.e.: if you normally tune to Eb, the levers or pedals must work properly so that the harp sounds all right playing in C-major)
- The teaching will be aimed at players of **at least Grade 3 level**, but we will consider including players of a lower level, if they are sincerely interested, and if their teachers will confirm that they are sufficiently promising and able, and likely to profit from the experience.

NB: *The project is **not** aimed at beginners or players of an elementary level.*

Each participant will be expected:

- to be able to tune his/her own harp (with the help of an electronic tuner if needed)
- to be willing to try learning 'by-ear', and not depend on written notation
- to learn and practise the tunes, and be able to play them **without copies**, bearing in mind the aim of performing them in ensemble in 2016. (This does not mean that every participant must take part in those performances, but they must respect that this is the eventual goal of the project.)

We have been very fortunate to secure substantial funding for this project from the Welsh Arts Council, and we are very grateful to them for their support.

