

JONES, NANSI RICHARDS ('Telynores Maldwyn') (1888-1979), harpist

Name: Nansi Richards Jones
Pseudonym: Telynores Maldwyn
Date of birth: 1888
Date of death: 1979
Spouse: Cecil Maurice Jones
Parent: Ann Richards (née Evans)
Parent: Thomas Richards
Gender: Female
Occupation: harpist
Area of activity: Music
Author: Nia Gwyn Evans

Nansi Richards was born on 14 May 1888 at Penybont Farm, Pen-y-bont-fawr, Montgomeryshire. Her baptismal name was Jane Ann. She was one of seven children born to Ann Richards (née Evans), Penybont Farm, and Thomas Richards of yr Hafod. Thomas was an accomplished tenor and a local singing teacher. Ann played the piano and it was she who first taught Nansi to read staff notation. Nansi's first school was Penbont in Pen-y-bont-fawr, and from there she went on to Cwmdu school in Penygarnedd, Cwm Soar. According to Nansi, her main influences were her father, the gypsies who spent long periods of time on the land of Penybont Farm, and her first harp teacher, Tom Lloyd, ('Telynor Ceiriog' - The Harpist of Ceiriog).

Nansi won the National Eisteddfod competition for Triple Harp in three consecutive years between 1908 and 1910. Following this she went to the Guildhall in London for formal harp tuition from Madame Arnold. Whilst in London she made the most of all opportunities, amongst which was playing for **Lloyd George** and his family in 10 Downing Street. In 1911 she entertained the royal family in Plas Machynlleth during the investiture of Edward VIII and as a result was able to call herself the 'Royal Harpist' and to use the royal coat of arms on her programmes. Before returning home in 1911 she toured the music halls with Moss and Stoll. During the First World War she entertained the troops in Gobowen every Saturday night, free of charge.

She ventured to America as a professional harpist in 1923. She received a golden harp from Lyon & Healy (Chicago) and performed for President Calvin Coolidge, the famous harpists Sevasta and Grandjany, Henry Ford, members of Yale University, as well as a community of Native Americans. One of the highspots of her visit was the experience of playing the harp in the Kellogg food factory, and Nansi claimed that she suggested putting the cockerel on the corn flakes packet because of the similarity between the name of the company and the Welsh word *ceiliog*.

In 1928 she married Cecil Maurice Jones, a banker who subsequently became a farmer, and they settled in Madog Café, Tremadog. During their time there Côr Telyn Eryri (the Snowdonia Harp Choir) was established in 1930, and was soon recognised as one of the foremost institutions of the period in Wales. There is evidence that Côr Telyn Eryri performed as many as 2,085 concerts up until 1975 (an average of just over 46 per year) - a remarkable feat given that they were an amateur group. In July 1943 she and Edith Evans ('Telynores Eryri' - The Harpist of Eryri) were invited to perform for the soldiers with the Entertainment National Service Association, or E.N.S.A.

Nansi performed in the Royal Festival Hall in London in 1952, and in July 1953 she was invited to perform for the Queen, Elizabeth II, to celebrate her visit to Flintshire. A month later she represented Wales in the Celtic Congress in Glasgow. In 1958 (when she moved from Caerhun, Conwy, back to her native home of Pen-y-bont-fawr) she was invited, along with Telynores Eryri to play for the Duke of Edinburgh (Prince Phillip) in the Elephant Hotel, Newtown on the 21 May.

In April 1963 researcher Joan Rimmer and a BBC representative, Madeau Stewart came to Penybont Farm to record Nansi playing the triple harp so that there were records in the BBC archive. Cecil had been hospitalized for some time and Nansi took the opportunity to practice and learn some pieces ready for broadcast. Within three months Cecil was dead and Nansi was exhausted and deeply upset.

The much anticipated book *Cwprdd Nansi* (Nansi's Cupboard) was published by Gomer Press in 1972. Also in 1972 the second recording of Nansi's performances was made by Decca 'Celfyddyd Telynores Maldwyn' (The Artistry of Telynores Maldwyn). This was released in 1973 and apart from 3 pieces, was exclusively played on the triple harp. Nansi returned to New York in September of 1973 to perform.

Nansi was honoured with the White Robes of the Gorsedd of Bards at the National Eisteddfod in Pwllheli in 1955. She was awarded a Cadair Powys Fellowship in 1958 and a national tribute meeting was held for her in the Corwen Pavilion in 1976. She received the MBE in 1967 and was given an honorary Doctorate of Music by the University of Wales in 1977.

By 1979 she was living in Parc, Bala, and had a stroke in October of that year. She was taken to hospital in Wrexham where she recuperated for a few weeks, after which she was moved to Dolgellau hospital, but her condition deteriorated slowly until she died on the 21 December 1979, aged 91. She was buried in Pennant Melangell churchyard.

Nansi Richards took every opportunity to promote her country in as natural a manner as possible. She travelled as a virtuoso musician but in reality was an envoy for all that is best in Welsh culture, and no diplomat could have done a better job. She worked for three quarters of a century, mainly as a triple and pedal harpist, but there were many other aspects to her life - poet, local historian, patron, collector, musician, composer and teacher.

It is not inappropriate to refer to Nansi as 'Queen of the Harp' given how multifaceted her contribution was. Her performances in all arenas never degenerated into a personal 'show'. One of her favourite sayings was 'to be big, you have to be small'. She not only worked hard on stage but also behind the stage, sourcing and buying harps for anyone who asked, teaching children and young people how to play the triple and pedal harps as well as espousing her belief that the tradition must be supported if it was to live. After her death, the Nansi Richards Trust was established, which offers financial support to any harpist under the age of 25 who was born or resides in Wales. This provides further evidence of her continuing influence on the harp world in Wales. Had it not been for 'Telynores Maldwyn', and particularly her dealings with the Gypsies, the triple harp would have died out as well as scores of old Welsh melodies. To hold the public's attention for such a long period is very difficult, but Nansi managed it. No one else made such a valuable contribution to the harp and traditional Welsh music as she did in the twentieth century.

Author

Nia Gwyn Evans

Sources

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Nansi Richards's correspondence, newspaper cuttings and posters available in the Music Department, University of Wales, Bangor

Transcripts of audio tapes from the Welsh Folk Museum, Sain Ffagan (interviewers: D. Roy Saer and Robin Gwyndaf)

Tribute Programme to Nansi Richards, HTV 1979 (Film Archive, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth)

'Nansi - Telynores Maldwyn' by Ffilmiau'r Bont, Caernarfon, July 2003

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Nansi Richards](#)

Images

Geoff Charles, Nansi Richards, Telynores Maldwyn, playing the triple harp at the Art Festival, Bangor, March 18, 1965

Sound and Film

Archif ITV Cymru/Wales Archive: [Nansi ac Edith](#)

Additional Links

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 22667C: Nansi Richards letters](#)

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Evans, N. G., (2016). JONES, NANSI RICHARDS ('Telynores Maldwyn') (1888-1979), harpist. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 15 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s10-RICH-NAN-1888>

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