

WYNNE, DAVID (1900-1983), composer

Name: David Wynne
Date of birth: 1900
Date of death: 1983
Gender: Male
Occupation: composer
Area of activity: Music
Author: Rhidian Griffiths

David Wynne was born at Nantmoch Uchaf farm, Penderyn, Breconshire, on 2 June 1900, the son of Philip Thomas (born 1872) and his wife Elizabeth (née Thomas, born 1877). He was christened David William Thomas, and later adopted the name David Wynne for his musical career. In 1901 the family moved to Llanfabon, Glamorgan, where his father found work in the Albion colliery in Cilfynydd. David attended the local school until he was twelve and then worked in a grocer's shop. On his fourteenth birthday he began work underground in the Albion colliery, where he remained until he was 25.

When he was twenty one of his sisters bought him a piano, and he began to take an interest in music and took lessons from T. Llewellyn Jenkins. In 1925 he won a Glamorgan Scholarship which enabled him to study music at the University College in Cardiff under **David Evans** and **John Morgan Lloyd**, taking his B.Mus. in 1928. Although he found **Evans** and **Lloyd** very conservative in their musical outlook, he appreciated the fact that scores of new works by contemporary composers were regularly purchased for the College library. From 1929 to 1960 he was music master at Lewis School, Pengam (the first full time music teacher in a secondary school in Wales), and he would number among his pupils two prominent musicians of a younger generation, Robert Smith and Mervyn Burtch. He taught at the Cardiff (Welsh) College of Music and Drama from 1960 to 1970, and then at the University College until 1980. He married Eirwen Evans in 1933, and he and his wife were always welcoming of other musicians at their home in Maesymer.

Early in his career he was influenced by contemporary music. He heard Edward Elgar conduct a performance of his *Second Symphony* in Cardiff in 1923, and was much impressed; so too by the performance he heard of the opera *Hugh the Drover* by Ralph Vaughan Williams, conducted by John Barbirolli, in 1925. But the turning point in his career came with the publication of the *Third Quartet* by the Hungarian composer Béla Bartók in 1927 - he studied this work carefully, as he did the *Five pieces for orchestra* by Arnold Schoenberg. No doubt Bartók was the strongest influence on him, but he developed his own style as a composer, becoming interested in the complex patterns of cynganedd in poetry, especially in the work of **Dafydd ap Gwilym**, which he tried to convey in his music.

He would work on his compositions during week-ends and school holidays, and began a new phase in his life when in 1945 he won the A. J. Clements Composition Prize for his *String Quartet no. 1*. One of the adjudicators of the competition was the English composer Michael Tippett, who became a close friend and advocate for his work. Wynne composed four symphonies and a number of large-scale chamber works, including five string quartets, four piano sonatas, and other instrumental works. He made use of traditional melodies in his two *Cymric rhapsodies* and his *Welsh Folk Song Suite*. Some of his works were recorded under the auspices of the Welsh Arts Council. Although the complexity of much of his work militates against frequent performance, David Wynne is acknowledged as one of the most innovative and influential of Welsh composers of the 20th century. He died at his home at Maesymer on 23 March 1983.

Author

Rhidian Griffiths

Sources

Richard Elfyn Jones, *David Wynne* (Cardiff 1979)

'David Wynne', Grove Music Online

Welsh Music, 5/7 (1977/78); 6/5 (1980)

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [David Wynne](#)

Additional Links

NLW Archives: [UW Aberystwyth Department of Music Archives: David Wynne](#)

Cardiff University Archives: [Papers of David Wynne \(1900-1983\), Welsh music teacher and composer](#)

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